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General Assembly

Official Records

Seventy-second session

5th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 19 September 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Laaksonen (Finland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Address by Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, President of the Republic of Mali

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, President of the Republic of Mali, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, President of the Republic of Mali, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Keita (*spoke in French*): At the outset, on behalf of Mali, allow me to extend warm congratulations to the President on his election to guide the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I also commend the outstanding work of his predecessor, Ambassador Peter Thomson. I wish to pay tribute to the Secretary-General of the Organization, my dear friend António Guterres, for his leadership, vision and commitment to the common values, purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Mali welcomes the choice of the theme of the present session — "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet" — which is both timely and relevant in a world that is confronted with the various challenges to peace, security and the considerable efforts needed to improve the living conditions of our populations. The highest priority of our joint efforts at present is not the effective preservation of our planet, which is of course in our best interests, but, more urgently, the interest of our future generations.

Given those numerous challenges, from which no one — not even my country, Mali — has been spared, since assuming my post as head of State, I have consistently devoted myself to working to quickly bringing peace and security for my people to an acceptable level, in creating genuine conditions for a decent life for the benefit of the Malian people and in improving our living environment. Since my election in 2013, I have firmly dedicated myself to the search for a negotiated political solution to the internal dimension of the Malian crisis.

After eight long months of intense and steadfast negotiations in Algiers — and, once again, I would like to say how much we appreciate the efforts of our Algerian brothers, especially those of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and we thank them for the welcome and the hospitality we received in that wonderful white city — the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was concluded. Today Mali is pleased with the conditions that were thus created for its future. The principal merit of the Agreement would have certainly been to immediately restore confidence among the Malian parties — no more belligerence.

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With the implementation of the Agreement, the general situation of the country has significantly improved.

I shall spare the Assembly the long list of the measures and concrete actions taken by the Government of Mali to implement the Agreement in strict accordance with the letter and the spirit of the commitments we have made. As an example, I would simply point out that, as of today, what we call in Mali the interim authorities and transitional colleges — two key elements of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation — are operational in the five regions of northern Mali.

In the same vein, I am particularly pleased with the current efforts aimed at the definitive return of the Malian administration to Kidal. That fortunate prospect was made possible by the efforts of the Malians themselves, aided by international mediation and the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). At the same time, the Government, under my authority, is working to stabilize the security situation in the central regions of the country, which today are a source of great concern for us and the whole country. That particular situation has become acute and urgent after the Algiers talks, which is to say that there is a new front to be secured and pacified. Important measures have therefore been taken and are currently under way, with very encouraging results.

Those results undoubtedly speak of the common will of Malian men and women to achieve peace, reconciliation and the re-establishment of genuine conditions for a good life together. We also owe those results to the multifaceted support of the men and women of the United Nations system in Mali. They have paid a high price to help us, otherwise maintaining peace would have been bloody. That is why I would like to commend the excellent work of the civilian and military staff of MINUSMA, who work under conditions that I know are difficult and often dangerous. From this rostrum, I would like to pay tribute to the memory of all of the victims, both civilian and military, Malian and foreign, who have fallen in the field of honour in Mali.

There have been numerous obstacles to the implementation of the Agreement, which have resulted in long delays, procrastination and postponements — all of which have generated immense impatience in national opinion and among international community.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Security Council for the adoption of resolution 2364 (2017), which renewed the mandate of MINUSMA. In addition, I am particularly pleased by the adoption, on 5 September, of resolution 2374 (2017), which establishes the legal framework for a sanctions regime against perpetrators of acts impeding the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Those two resolutions are aimed at the effective resolution of the types of difficulties underlying the implementation of the Agreement. They also reflect the steadfast determination of my Government to tirelessly continue in its political and institutional efforts for firmness and diligence in the processes related to the effectiveness of the Agreement.

The deterioration of the security situation in Mali has had a negative impact on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation. Insecurity in Mali and the Sahel is a source of great concern for my country and for our neighbours. The situation poses, in all respects, a real threat to international peace and security. It is marked by terrorism, violent extremism and other forms of organized transnational crime, including trafficking in drugs, weapons and people.

The Sahel is swarming with organized-crime groups. They have access to substantial material, financial and logistical resources and pose serious challenges to the individual functioning institutions and organizations of all our States. They sow death through their criminal and asymmetrical attacks. Working to conquer areas only partially under our sovereignty, they find themselves free to maintain and spread their criminal activities, thereby seriously threatening the foundations, and even the very existence, of our States.

No single country by itself would be able to confront those cross-border threats. That was the entire rationale behind the establishment of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) by Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Chad so as to confront together shared challenges related to the security and the development of our countries. From its founding, in February 2014, to the present, our organization — which I have the privilege of chairing in 2017 and 2018 — has made tremendous progress. In particular, it has put in place the force conjointe du G-5 Sahel to combat terrorism, transnational organized crime and the trafficking of migrants.

Although the adoption of Security Council resolution 2359 (2017) was certainly an important step, we would have preferred it to have been adopted under

Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which would have ensured its predictable and sustainable funding, including through the United Nations, in accordance with the decision by the African Union Peace and Security Council of 13 April.

The force represents the collective resolve of our States to work together to secure and develop the region that we share, with the support of our partners — whom I commend here for their constant support at our side. Today we are working tirelessly towards the effective operationalization and functioning of the force, with the very much appreciated support of friendly countries and partner organizations.

The first operations of the force will, we hope, begin in October. I can assure the Assembly that those operations will be carried out in strict compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law. A civilian mechanism will be deployed within the force so as to monitor that issue, which is so important to us, because the success of the force depends on the full and continued support of our people.

I would nevertheless like to draw the Assembly's attention to some of the challenges that characterize the operationalization and maintenance of the force. Among them, mobilizing comprehensive funding for the force figures prominently. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to invite all friendly countries and international partner organizations to the international contribution planning conference for the force to be held in Brussels in December. I would like to give my assurance that resources allocated to the force will be managed with total transparency. Moreover, we remain open to any support from our partners that can help ensure better management of the resources of the force conjointe.

I would also like to add, for the benefit of the friendly countries and international organizations that are ready to help us, that the Joint Force is in the public interest of all. Although we are going through a transitional phase today, the battle that we are waging in the Sahel is akin to a dam. If that dam were to give, that would be a misfortune for the civilized world, which shares our values. Therefore, in areas that involve equipping battalions and reinforcing logistics resources, as well as communications, emergency medical evacuation and combating the use of improvised explosive devices, we need the world's help.

Alongside security issues, the G-5 Sahel places high priority on issues involving development, the resilience of populations, governance and decent jobs for the youth of our countries, among others. I would like to call on members of the General Assembly and the international community to provide sustained support to the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme.

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals remains a priority for Mali. In that context, in 2016, the Government adopted its strategic framework for economic recovery and sustainable development for the period from 2016 to 2018. Its overall goal is to promote inclusive and sustainable development, with the aim of reducing poverty and inequalities in a united and peaceful Mali, while building on the potential and capacity for resilience, with a view to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The macroeconomic framework of our country has improved, and numerous indicators show encouraging developments, including robust economic growth with an annual average of approximately 6 per cent, and a substantial improvement in the business environment. This was noted by the Arab Maghreb Union. In that context, Mali will hold the Invest in Mali Forum on 7 and 8 December in Bamako, and we invite friendly countries and international organizations to come and bet on Mali.

As a Sahelian country with an agro-sylvo-pastoral system, Mali remains deeply concerned about climate change, which is one of the major challenges involving the survival and development of humankind. That is why I would like to reiterate Mali's commitment to the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, to which it is party. In that regard, the international community must remain committed to its implementation so as to preserve the ecosystem for present and future generations.

The world continues to face numerous public health challenges, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and Ebola. While commending the progress made in the fight against those pandemics, we must strengthen international efforts so as to achieve the shared goal of eradicating those diseases. We must redouble our vigilance and efforts so as to implement, in particular, the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to End the AIDS Epidemic by 2030, which we, the world's leaders, adopted in New York in June 2016.

Concerning migration issues, Mali fully supports the ongoing process in the Organization aimed at the adoption in 2018 of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. Together we must seek suitable solutions to the human tragedy taking place in the Mediterranean and the desert, which leaves no human conscience indifferent and leads to thousands of deaths, including those of women and children. That maritime cemetery represents a scandal for the twenty-first century, and it must stop.

Mali is at one and the same time a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants. We therefore have established a national migration policy with a view to better overseeing the phenomenon. Mali has also established national mechanisms for better managing migration issues.

I take this opportunity to commend the substantial contribution of the Malian diaspora to the economic, scientific, cultural and social development of Mali. The diaspora constitutes both our pride and our wealth.

The Government and the people of Mali continue to pay close attention to the situation in Africa and the rest of the world. We are therefore concerned about the situation in Libya, which continues to have a negative impact on the Sahel region. We call on all Libyan stakeholders to encourage the search for peaceful solutions with a view to achieving a lasting settlement of the crisis.

Mali pays equal attention to the ongoing situation in the Middle East, in particular as concerns the impasse in negotiations surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Mali reaffirms its support for the brotherly Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle to regain their inalienable rights and calls for the resumption of negotiations aimed at a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security in a calm Middle East.

Similarly, we are concerned about the unprecedented increase in terrorism, violent extremism and religious intolerance in the world. To contain those global threats, which spare no country, we need to strengthen international and regional cooperation, foster a fruitful, ongoing dialogue and combat the vulnerabilities that expose our communities to extremist ideology. Mali welcomes the successes around the world in the fight against terrorist organizations and urgently calls for more cooperation and coordination in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel.

The realities and demands of today's world require that we adapt global governance to current challenges. The revitalization of the General Assembly and the long-awaited reform of the Security Council are becoming increasingly necessary if we are to have a United Nations capable of responding effectively to the legitimate expectations of all nations. That has been said here today.

Mali reaffirms its commitment to the African Common Position on the reform of the Security Council. Moreover, we express our concern about the current tendency to reduce the budget of peacekeeping operations at the very time when such operations have become crucial and substantial in terms of volume.

I wish to reiterate the Government of Mali's call for the necessary adaptation of peacekeeping operations to the dizzying developments surrounding them: global threats. We believe that the call we just launched for support for our common regional organization, the G-5 Sahel, must be promoted so that we may receive energetic support for the G-5 Sahel and establish the effective business and financing that we lack. Unfortunately, very often such promises remain mere pronouncements, at the very time such operations are indispensable and urgent for the well-being of the populations under permanent threat from diverse groups infesting the region.

Let me also say that today that our region is concerned about the trend in United Nations budgetary cutbacks. Each of us has been somewhat reassured today by strong statements made.

We have a collective responsibility to bring about peace and to ensure security worldwide. We have the collective responsibility to leave no one behind and to create the conditions for inclusive development for our populations. We have the collective responsibility to save and to preserve our environment and our common planet. Through my voice, Mali fully commits to play its role in this collective endeavour to build a better world for all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Mali for the statement just made.

Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, President of the Republic of Mali, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco.

His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Prince Albert (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by telling the President how pleased I am to see him conducting the work of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We wish him success in the accomplishment of this important and delicate task in the service of the international community. I have an excellent memory of my official visit to Slovakia last May. On that occasion I was able to appreciate his work and to consolidate the good relations between our two States.

"Peace must be our goal and guide". But "without a healthy environment we cannot end poverty and build prosperity". Those are the words of the Secretary-General, and current circumstances give those words special resonance. It is clear that the threat of nuclear escalation in Asia has never been greater, and that notion can leave no leader indifferent.

In accordance with its obligations, Monaco complies with the Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter. Respecting the commitments that apply to each Member State is paramount. We therefore refuse to be powerless witnesses of the indefensible stances that pose a grave danger to all our States. We condemn the irresponsibility of those who expose humankind to an irreversible disaster.

Recognizing the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, Monaco continues to support collective efforts for the promotion of peace and security. As a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, Monaco participates actively in the work of those regional institutions. In that connection, the Principality pays particular attention to the work of the Special Monitoring Mission on the crisis in Ukraine and its vicinity.

The Principality of Monaco, with 140 nationalities in its territory, has always been open to dialogue. Our country has been enriched by that diversity, which continues today. We are convinced that our common values — the defence of human rights, of democracy and of the rule of law — are among the ongoing priorities of a modern State concerned with the welfare of its citizens and those who live on its soil. The ideals that unite us allow us to move forward together, as our goals remain unfulfilled.

The fight against impunity is part and parcel of those ideals. Refusing to allow atrocity to dictate the law is a sine qua non condition of assumed sovereignty. The Principality of Monaco is fully committed to respect for justice and peace. That underpins our support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on the most serious crimes committed in Syria. To the best of its ability, Monaco will continue its contribution in terms of the assistance to that country's long-suffering civilian population in order to enable them to rebuild and imagine a better future.

The situation in Africa, where over 20 million individuals are risk of losing their lives as a result of famine, will have serious consequences. Although drought is an exacerbating factor, it must be recognized that the primary cause for this humanitarian disaster is war. In keeping with our traditions, Monaco expresses solidarity by responding to the call of the United Nations for contributions to the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as to Monegasque non-governmental organizations.

Above and beyond those urgent humanitarian actions, Monaco's cooperation system implements a policy promoting the eradication of poverty and fostering sustainable development to serve the most vulnerable. My country's new strategic plan for official development assistance will work with public and private partners to respond to the most pressing needs — food security, health, education and job placement — beyond the mere duty to assist.

Good governance, the fight against corruption, and sufficient public resources are not empty words, but rather assets without which no State can meet the basic needs of its population or establish its development policies in a long-lasting manner.

Those crises serve only to further justify the Secretary-General's advocacy for "protection and

respect for human rights and for the creation of decent work opportunities for young people".

Today, by depositing our instrument of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, I once again wish to associate my country with the efforts of the international community to promote their fundamental freedom and dignity. As Dag Hammarskjöld so aptly observed,

(*spoke in English*)

> "The United Nations was not created to lead mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell."

(*spoke in French*)

Attacks on innocent civilians affect us all, wherever they are perpetrated. We hope that the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism can bring us together in our determination to annihilate this barbarism.

Climate change is putting humankind in imminent danger. The unprecedented violence of recent extreme weather events serve to prompt us once again to recognize our limitations. Faced with nature unleashed, people will always lose. Hurricanes and typhoons have tragic consequences whether they form in the Atlantic or the North Pacific. The Paris Climate Change Agreement has garnered 195 signatures and 159 States parties. That is the clearest proof of the urgency felt at the global level. Only by promoting global awareness and mobilizing all sectors of our societies can we adapt our economies successfully. Several States, including Monaco, as well as some private companies, have already announced major measures aimed at changing our modes of transport, production and consumption. In general, a change in our lifestyles is more than necessary; it is crucial. The joint UNICEF-World Health Organization report of 12 July on access to water and sanitation reveals glaring inequalities that continue to worsen. Too many people are still marginalized or living in unacceptable conditions.

We must also resolutely persevere in the fight against all forms of serious violence against human dignity. In particular, we must work to improve the status of women as long as the discrimination and violence of which they are victims continues. Monaco welcomes the courageous initiative of the Secretary-General in that regard and yesterday signed the Voluntary Compact between the United Nations and Member States with a view to eliminating exploitation and sexual abuse in peace operations, humanitarian assistance, the promotion and protection of human rights and, more broadly, in the Organization's contribution to sustainable development. That commitment is a strong message that zero tolerance should become the norm for all States.

I believe it is important today to reflect on the creation of the United Nations, if only to appreciate it more. This exercise in remembering can enable us to put our current difficulties into perspective and convince us — if we needed to be convinced — of the importance of this global Organization. That brings me to express my satisfaction with respect to the vision that the Secretary-General has put forward so that the Organization will be better able to assist its Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We support him in his reform initiatives because we want a modern and efficient Organization where international civil servants, both at Headquarters and in its many fields of operation, are invested in a priority mission for which their work and self-sacrifice are recognized. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to all those who undertake to fulfil this mission on the ground, sometimes, as we have sadly seen too often this year, by putting their lives at risk. It is up to us, the leaders gathered in this forum, to forge an ambitious consensus and provide realistic mandates and sufficient resources to the Organization.

The first voluntary report from Monaco on its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July. Monaco, like every State here today, can now deal with ensuring the effectiveness of its choices with respect to the global goals that we adopted here two years ago. I would like to mention the Assembly's call to action on 9 June with its adoption of resolution 71/312, which recognized that the ocean is our future. The implementation of SDG 14 on marine life, has special significance, and the success of the Ocean Conference, which focused on it, showed us that the conservation and sustainable development of the oceans and seas and their resources are essential for our survival.

We are fully and forever committed to our planet in general and to the oceans in particular. I firmly believe that our ability to save the ocean from gradual decline will help us save the planet. That is why I welcome the Secretary-General's visionary decision to appoint a Special Envoy for the Ocean, which highlights the

challenges to be met and is greatly needed if we are to streamline our actions. There can be no doubt as to the dedication and unwavering commitment of the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, Mr. Peter Thomson, whom we warmly congratulate both on the work he has accomplished in recent months and on his new responsibilities. We have great hopes for his ability to bring together the United Nations system, civil society, the private sector and academia to ensure that the targets of SDG 14 are met. It is therefore with great pride that the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco and the Prince Albert I Foundation will host him at the Maison des Océans in Paris. In doing so, the Principality is continuing a tradition established by my great-great-grandfather — a prince, oceanographer and passionate scientist — one of whose ambitions was to make science accessible to all and to use new knowledge to improve the well-being of humankind.

A few weeks ago I had the privilege of presenting, on the sidelines of the SDG 14 Conference, the Monaco Explorations initiative. The vessel *Yersin*'s three-year voyage around the world aims to increase our knowledge through marine biological research in association with local scientists, disseminate the results of our research and promote collective and concerted action in areas such as the creation of protected marine zones, while stimulating innovation.

I would like to conclude by affirming my confidence in science, which enables us to base our decisions on proven and verifiable facts. Whether it reassures us or frightens us, science must spur us to action and thereby to moving forward together towards progress and the hope for a better world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco for the statement he has just made.

Prince Albert II of Monaco was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Poland.

Mr. Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Duda (*spoke in Polish; interpretation provided by the delegation*): I would first like to congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, on his election to this honourable post. I would also like to assure him of Poland's full support for the tasks ahead of him and to say how pleased we are at his election, since he represents a country that is a friend and neighbour to my own. Once again, I offer him my warmest congratulations. I would also like to express my thanks to Mr. Peter Thomson for his active presidency during the seventy-first session of the General Assembly.

Like the pillars of the United Nations system, the international community's basic goals are the promotion of sustainable development, the maintenance of peace and security and the protection of human rights. I was therefore very pleased to learn that the theme of this year's session is focusing on people's needs. Too often in global politics we devote too much time and attention to broad economic models and social systems, forgetting that politics and economics are in fact human issues. When we lose our focus on those issues, we inevitably lose sight of the goal that underpins our shared efforts, which should be that of ensuring peace and well-being for every individual and family in every State through a policy whose goal is to serve the people and meet their needs, and that is based on the notion of the dignity that is inherent in human life.

As we address a people-centred policy that is focused on the human need to live in peace and in decent conditions, we should first and foremost consider the importance of defending and protecting human life. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which we all adopted, defines a global model for sustainable development. In line with its recommendations, we should concentrate our efforts on the elimination of poverty in all its manifestations through the implementation of a series of economic, social and environmental goals. At the same time, we must bear in mind that this process should be accompanied by respect for all our interconnected rights, including economic, social, political, civil and cultural rights and the right to development. While in adopting the 2030 Agenda we demonstrated our ability to take action as a community,

the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals remains a formidable challenge that will require close cooperation at the international level.

As a reliable and responsible partner, Poland is committed to the full implementation of the Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We believe that only through their effective implementation will we be able to ensure the achievement of the desired socioeconomic conditions for all. That involves coordination and comprehensive action across many sectors and at all levels of Government, from local to national to regional to international. Domestically, Poland is taking concrete steps to implement its vision for development in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda to ensure that none of its citizens is left behind.

The strategy for responsible development that the Polish Government adopted in February is designed to ensure that Poland and its people can maintain a level of development that is sustainable, stable and, most important, responsible, and that will embrace both current and, especially, future generations. In the international arena, Poland supports countries that, among other things, are seeking to develop economically through development cooperation. We want to ensure that our actions are as effective as possible, and therefore, using the experience of the Polish authorities and non-governmental organizations, we are working with States that we can support most effectively.

We are deeply concerned about the growing number of people who are suffering as a result of protracted conflicts, particularly in Syria and Ukraine. Guided by the principle of solidarity, we have also been consistently increasing our humanitarian aid. In our view, it is also very important to ensure cohesion and complementarity between humanitarian aid and development aid and to work to eliminate the underlying causes of humanitarian crises. That is our shared duty, and the future of the world order and the international community depends upon how we deliver on it. In addition, we should not fail to continue to respect and strengthen international humanitarian law.

One of the Goals of the 2030 Agenda is halting the changes occurring in our natural environment, which can be seen in every country and on every continent, and which have are having negative effects on national economies and the living standards of entire communities. For a number of years, Poland has been part of global efforts to protect the environment and combat climate change. We have fulfilled our obligations in that regard, surpassing our reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol. We have worked in concert with the European Union to make an exceedingly ambitious global contribution to the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and will continue our low-carbon development efforts with the aim of protecting our climate.

Next year, for the third time, Poland will have the honour of hosting the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24). COP 24, to be held in the city of Katowice, will be of key importance, owing to the Conference's expected adoption of the implementation package for the Paris Agreement. As President of the COP, Poland will do its best to ensure that the summit's outcome is an ambitious one. We will continue to demonstrate leadership in climate negotiations, in the spirit of the Paris Agreement, while ensuring that all States can participate and that the discussions are transparent, while respecting countries' varying domestic conditions and their choices along the path to reducing emissions.

Poland's election to the Security Council as a non-permanent member for the period 2018-2019 reflects my country's growing potential and its involvement in efforts to ensure international peace and security. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the 190 votes cast for Poland, one of the best results in the history of elections to the Council. For us, the election and its result are both a huge honour and a major obligation. I would like to thank the United Nations community for placing their confidence in us. We view our membership in the Security Council as a commitment to representing all States Members of the United Nations, regardless of their affiliations with regional groups.

We see the Security Council as representing values that are particularly important to my nation. First and foremost, they include our firm attachment to the inalienable right of every nation to sovereignty and freedom. We are joining the Security Council in the conviction that international law is the only effective mechanism for preserving peaceful relations among nations. Freedom is synonymous with peace, while enslavement is a source of war. Principles such as the freedom of speech and sovereign nation States' right to self-determination are of particular importance to

security. I bring this subject up because last year in particular saw an increase in instances in many States where political processes were manipulated through the imposition of hybrid measures, either by means of propaganda or direct interference in the democratic process. Such attempts by third countries to influence the democratic policies pursued by free nations should also be of concern to the international community.

Such issues, as well as analysis of current international relations, serve to emphasize that security in the modern world should be viewed from many platforms. It is not just a State's military strength that determines its citizens' sense of security, but also areas that often transcend the regular purview of the Security Council's work. Changes in the natural environment, economic disparities, conflicts fuelled by competition over natural resources, and inadequate health care can also undermine that sense of security, and I believe those issues should feature permanently on the Council's agenda.

Respect for, and the absolute primacy of, international law in relations among States safeguard our effectiveness in ensuring international peace and security. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Poland will strive to ensure that all disputes and conflicts are resolved in line with the fundamental principle of peaceful settlement. In that context, we fully agree with the high priority that should be given to mediation and conflict prevention, as advocated by the Secretary-General, and which accords with our belief that preventive measures that target the underlying sources of problems on the ground produce the best, quickest and most tangible results.

When I visited the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa earlier this year, I discussed the importance of the international community's ability to prevent conflicts. Conflicts do not exist without root causes and, by the same token, there are no conflicts that cannot be brought to an end. We should apply that approach first and foremost, though not exclusively, to issues related to mass migration and refugees, which represent problems that many regions and continents share. The continuing internal clashes and risks of terrorist attacks in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as all the challenges that they entail, call for a common response on the part of the whole international community. That is why it is our duty to eliminate the root causes of the refugee problem and restore the right of all people to live in their home countries. Humanitarian operations and development aid must be aimed at achieving the fundamental goal of helping refugees in order ultimately to help them return to their homes. Operations that help to build the resilience of States and societies are particularly important to efforts to deal with issues such as structural poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education.

Poland has always considered ensuring the effectiveness of international law to be of prime importance. Its regulations are founded on the principles of cooperation and meeting international obligations in good faith, thereby ensuring that international disputes can be resolved through dialogue rather than aggression and armed violence. In dealing with situations in which States use aggression as an instrument of foreign policy, Poland urges the international community to refrain from recognizing the faits accomplis that can result from such policies.

We in Poland want to help to build an international order founded on the principles of State sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any attempt to violate those principles, successful or not, weakens mutual trust. For almost 10 years in Georgia, and almost three in Ukraine, we have witnessed clear violations of the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the inviolability of borders, respect for sovereignty and rejection of the use of military force in the settlement of disputes. In our view, absolute respect for international law creates a foundation for the stable, predictable and peaceful settlement of differences among States, and through that the assurance of truly sustainable growth.

The situation in the Korean peninsula has been marked by flagrant attempts to disrupt the prevailing world order that have contributed to the growing risk of escalation of the situation in the region. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's development of a nuclear and missile programme, as well as its most recent tests of nuclear weapons, constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We hope that the international community will continue its intensified efforts in that regard, including the Council's recent adoption of new resolutions, and enable us to halt the spiral of tension and stabilize the situation in the region.

Poland sets great store by the goals of disarmament and the idea of a world free of nuclear weapons. The only instrument at hand that can genuinely bring us closer to achieving that vision is the Treaty on the

Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The Treaty is subject to review every five years in order to take stock of progress towards its realization and reinforce its commitments. Poland has now taken the lead in the preparation process for the upcoming NPT Review Conference in 2020, a testament to our longstanding commitment to non-proliferation, a ban on nuclear tests and the peaceful use of atomic energy.

The third pillar of the United Nations system is the protection of human rights, whose foundation is the fundamental right to life. Regrettably, there are too many places in the world that have been stripped of that right, as well as the right to human dignity, personal freedom and freedom of conscience and religion. One particularly visible problem in that regard is the persecution of religious minorities, including Christians. Poland condemns in the strongest terms every instance of persecution and discrimination based on religion and insists on the importance of States' commitments to ensuring protection to all members of religious minorities, in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The right to live in dignity should also include the right to uphold one's native traditions and traditional family model, as long as they are compatible with the fundamental rights of individuals.

In its campaign for membership of the Security Council, Poland chose the motto "Solidarity, responsibility, engagement". Those are the values that we are constantly seeking to promote in the international arena. Only through a sense of shared responsibility, coupled with harmonious engagement and cooperation among all States, will we be able to achieve sustainable development, security and peace, and not only today, but for generations to come.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Poland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Mr. Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Al Sisi (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and to wish him every success in carrying out his duties. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to Mr. Peter Thomson, the outgoing President, who so ably oversaw the Assembly's work at its seventy-first session.

Each time we meet in this Hall, we rekindle the hopes and aspirations of the peoples whom we are honoured to represent and serve. We hope to provide them with peace and development. New generations look up to us to realize their dreams for a decent life within a just international order. It is a global order that can face challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, diseases and epidemics, as well as other man-made crises — war, terrorism and huge discrepancies in the distribution of resources and development opportunities.

It is evident that the purposes and principles of the United Nations are still valid as a basis for a world that offers everyone an opportunity to benefit from the great strides being made in scientific advancement and economic development, as well as from the information revolution, which has brought societies unprecedentedly closer. Those developments offer great potential for establishing a fair and secure international order — one that is based on the right to development, freedom and progress and open interactions between people. In Egypt, we adamantly believe in the values of the United Nations and the purposes of its Charter. We have great confidence that realizing those values is not only possible, but rather an obligation and a necessity.

Egypt's long-standing involvement with the United Nations — both as a founding Member of the Organization that has been elected to the Security Council six times and as the seventh-largest contributor to peacekeeping operations worldwide — bears witness to our constant striving to build a world that is worthy

of the aspirations of our children and grandchildren to live in freedom, dignity, security and prosperity.

However, the responsibility that we bear requires that we be frank in saying that the world we seek, albeit possible, unfortunately still remains far from reality. We are still unable to prevent armed conflict, confront terrorism, eliminate nuclear weapons or address the structural imbalances in the international economic order that have widened the gap between the developed and developing worlds. Based on the experiences of the African and Arab regions, I can state with a clear conscience that those experiences summarize the current crisis of the international order and its inability to deliver on the goals of the United Nations.

The Arab region, Egypt's civilizational and cultural milieu, has today become an epicentre for some of the most vicious civil conflicts in recent human history. It is the region most vulnerable to the dangers posed by terrorism. One out of every three refugees in the world today is an Arab, and the Mediterranean Sea has become a conduit for irregular migrants from Asian and African States fleeing the scourge of civil strife, as well as the despair of economic and social hardships. That is reflected in the Arab regional report on multidimensional poverty in Arab countries published by the League of Arab States in collaboration with the United Nations. The report will be issued tomorrow.

As Egypt's geographical home, Africa lies at the heart of Egypt's foreign policy. It is Africa where our historic roots lie, and it is from Africa that we derive pride in our identity and our deep sense of belonging. The continent has also become subject to the same security threats facing the Arab region and constitutes a major example of the crisis in the current international economic order that perpetuates poverty and economic disparity. This global order bears a major responsibility in the economic, political and social crises that threaten international peace and stability, rendering any discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals just words without evidence based on reality.

Egypt is therefore encircled by the most dangerous crises in the world. It is our destiny to navigate confidently through those unprecedented dangers, while relying on an ambitious development strategy based on radical, bold economic reforms. Those reforms aim, above all else, to empower the youth, who represent the majority of the population, not only in Egypt but also in most of the Arab countries and the developing world.

In a world that is interconnected, complex and full of challenges that cannot be confronted by one country alone, regardless of its capabilities, it is natural for Egypt's ambitious development plans to correlate with an active foreign policy. That foreign policy strategy is guided by the long-established moral principles ingrained in our heritage and culture and abides by the legal principles of the international system, which Egypt actively participated in formulating. It is based on a vision to address the shortcomings that have prevented the realization of the objectives of the United Nations. Our vision is based on the following five main principles and priorities.

First, the only possible solution to the crises afflicting the Arab region is through persistently upholding the notion of the modern nation-State based on the principles of citizenship, equality, the rule of law and human rights, and thereby defeating any attempts to retreat into doctrinal, sectarian, ethnic or tribal loyalties. The path towards reform inevitably includes embracing the nation-State and cannot be built on its demise. This principle, in summary, lies at the core of Egypt's foreign policy and is the foundation upon which we base our positions in addressing the crises in our region.

With regard to brotherly Syria, we believe there will be no salvation for Syria except through a consensual political solution among all Syrians. At its core is the preservation of the unity of the Syrian State, the maintenance of its institutions and the broadening of its political and social base to include all sectors of Syrian society, as well as the decisive confrontation of terrorism until it is defeated. The way to this solution is through the United Nations-led negotiation process, which enjoys strong support from Egypt. Equally as strong is our objection to any attempt to manipulate the tragedy in Syria to establish international or regional zones of influence or carry out the subversive policies of some regional parties — parties whose practices have caused great suffering to our region over the past few years. It is now high time for a final and decisive confrontation with those practices.

Similarly, we believe that a political settlement is the only viable solution to the crisis in Libya. Libya continues to face attempts to dismantle the State and turn it into an open field for tribal conflict, a field of operations for terrorist organizations. I would like clearly to underscore that Egypt will not allow the continuation of attempts to tamper with the unity

and integrity of the Libyan State or undermine the capabilities of the Libyan people. We will continue to work diligently with the United Nations to achieve a political settlement based on the Skhirat Agreement and inspired by the recommendations agreed upon by Libyans. The recommendations that emerged from their consecutive meetings in Cairo during the past months aim to end the political stalemate and revive the settlement process in the country.

The same logic applies to Egypt's strategy in Iraq and Yemen: the only way to overcome the crises is with a unified, capable and just modern nation-State that realizes the legitimate aspirations of the Arab people.

Secondly, it is time for a comprehensive and final settlement to the longest-standing crisis in the Arab region, namely, the question of Palestine. This is a clear depiction of the international community's inability to implement a long series of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The closure of this chapter — through a fair settlement based on established international norms and by establishing an independent Palestinian State along the 1967 border with East Jerusalem as its capital — is a necessary precondition for the entire region to transition into a phase of stability and development. That is also necessary to restore the credibility of the United Nations and the international order.

Achieving peace will without a doubt eliminate one of the main excuses that terrorism has been using to justify its proliferation in the region. It will guarantee a dignified and peaceful life for the peoples of the region. It is time to permanently overcome the barrier of hatred forever. I would like to underscore here that Arabs still extend their hand in peace. Egypt's experience proves that peace is possible, and is indeed a realistic objective that we should all continue to pursue seriously.

Before I continue my statement, allow me to veer off script for a moment and call directly upon everyone who is concerned by this issue.

My first audience is the Palestinian people. I say to them that it is extremely important to unite behind a common goal, overcome differences, not to lose opportunities and be ready to accept coexistence with the other — with Israelis — to achieve stability and security for all.

I now direct my call to the Israeli people. In Egypt we have an excellent track record of peace with Israelis that spans more than 40 years. It is possible to repeat that experience — an excellent step to achieve peace and security for both Israeli and Palestinian citizens. My call to Israelis is to stand behind their political leadership and support it without hesitation. I urge the Israeli public not to hesitate. We are all with them for the success of that attempt. This opportunity might not repeat itself.

My other call is to all nations that love peace and stability. All Arab States support Israel's excellent endeavour. Other nations, too, must support its endeavour, which, if successful, will change the face of history.

I also address the American leadership and the American President: we have an opportunity to turn over a new page in human history and achieve peace in the region.

The third of my main principles and priorities is that it is impossible to envisage a future for the regional or international order in which we have not definitively and comprehensively addressed terrorism. That should be approached in a manner that eradicates terrorism and eliminates its roots and causes, while also openly challenging any party that supports or finances terrorism or that offers it political and media channels or safe havens.

Frankly, there is no room for any serious discussion on the credibility of a system that applies double standards — a system that fights terrorism while tolerating its supporters and engaging them in discussions on how to eliminate a threat that they created in the first place. To be truthful and faithful to our peoples, members of various international alliances should answer the pertinent questions that we are raising out of devotion to our people. Answers are usually avoided by those who prefer duplicity to attain narrow political interests in the demise of States and at the expense of blood shed by their people. We will not allow our peoples' sacrifices to be made in vain, under any circumstances.

We in the Muslim world need to face up to our reality and work together to rectify the misconstrued notions that have become an ideological pretext for terrorism and its destructive discourse. As members may recall, Egypt launched an initiative to rectify religious discourse in order to revive the true and tolerant values of Islam. Egypt's religious institutions

are currently engaged in that process, in coordination with the relevant international entities.

Egypt, which is currently engaged in an unrelenting battle to eradicate terrorism from its territory, is committed to tracking, confronting and eliminating terrorism decisively, wherever it exists. It is evident that confronting terrorism has been at the forefront of Egypt's priorities during its 2016-2017 membership in the Security Council and during our chairmanship of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee. We do not wish to defend only Egypt's future, but also the future of the international community as a whole.

Our fourth priority is to eliminate the root causes of international crises and the sources of threat to international stability, That requires the operationalization of the principle of a common but differentiated responsibility among the members of the international community, in order to narrow the economic and social gaps between developed and developing countries.

How can the United Nations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals have any credibility when the international economic order is itself responsible for augmenting disparities, in a manner inconsistent with the values of justice and equality? How can there be any opportunity for less developed countries, no matter how determined they are, to implement fundamental economic reforms to address the mismanagement of their resources without addressing imbalances in the international economic order? Such endeavours require greater involvement by developing countries in international economic governance structures and facilitating their access to easier financing, markets and technology transfer.

Fifthly, settling disputes in our world today can be achieved only through respect for the principles of international law and negotiation on the basis of legal, historic and moral principles, as well respect for the sovereignty of States and the principle of non-intervention in individual States' internal affairs. More than seven decades after the establishment of the United Nations, force and zero-sum games cannot remain as a means to realize interests — especially in today's world, which is based on interdependence among nations and where there are significant opportunities for cooperation and understanding to achieve the common interests of all.

Based on the principles I have mentioned, Egypt was at the forefront of countries eager to initiate the Nile Basin initiative in 1999. Egypt also pursued the conclusion of a trilateral agreement between Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia to address the issue of the Renaissance Dam from a cooperative perspective, in a manner that establishes a clear legal framework to manage the issue in accordance with international law, established principles and the well-established rules that govern relations between States sharing basins of transboundary rivers throughout the world. That agreement remains as a legal framework that can be used as an example to reflect the logic of cooperation and sharing among the three parties, as long as good faith continues. It is of paramount importance to implement the agreement, in the light of the limited amount of time available, to avoid squandering the opportunity of presenting a successful model to manage relations between three sisterly countries in the Nile basin.

Our meeting here today is an opportunity for truthful self-reflection, in which we should acknowledge the various deficiencies that are hindering the international system from delivering on the noble objectives and aspirations it was set up to realize. It is also an opportunity to renew our commitment to establish a more equitable international order, given that the attainment of justice globally remains a necessary condition to confront the immense challenges impacting our world today and endangering the credibility of the international system.

The humanitarian tragedy of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar is yet another reason to remind the international community of its moral obligations, not to mention its legal responsibilities, as reflected in the Charter of the United Nations. We must promptly work towards a lasting solution that ends the plight of civilians and addresses the root causes of the crisis, which has become a threat to regional security and the stability of neighbouring countries.

Let us move together to empower the people of the world to regain control of their destinies and to explore new horizons of cooperation between members of the international community. Let us transcend the vicious cycle of narrow interests and the futile logic of power politics to the broader horizons of common human interests and cooperation among all. Let us be true to ourselves and dispel the mentality of polarizing policies. The world today is in dire need of the upholding of common human interests. It is incumbent upon all

States to strive to further relations among all partners with malice towards none.

I have conveyed Egypt's message to the General Assembly today explicitly and clearly. I am full of hope that our joint efforts during the upcoming period will lead to a better world that is more secure, stable and prosperous. Long live Egypt!

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt for the statement he has just made.

His Excellency Mr. Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mirziyoyev (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me to express my sincere gratitude for this opportunity to speak from the high rostrum of the United Nations.

A few weeks ago, our people widely celebrated the twenty-sixth anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence. Today Uzbekistan is rapidly developing. While carefully preserving the wisdom of past generations, we are consciously moving forward with resolute reforms and are committed to creating a new image of the country.

Political activity is growing and in-depth reforms are being implemented in all spheres. Their goal is to forge a democratic State and a just society, where the priority is the implementation of a simple and clear principle: human interests come first. Following the results of nationwide discussions, the five-year development strategy for Uzbekistan was adopted. While developing it, we looked at ourselves from outside, so as to not only objectively assess our potential and the opportunities before us, but also to pay close attention to our failures and mistakes. The strategy is a programme of real actions for renewal; it is already being put into practice.

We have declared 2017 the Year of Dialogue with People and Human Interests in our country. Our goal is to strengthen the mechanisms that would make people's power in the country not nominal, but real. We are deeply convinced that it is not the people who must serve the Government bodies, but rather the Government bodies that must serve the people. We have established one Virtual and many People's Reception Offices of the President all over the country. Over 1 million citizens have been able to resolve their urgent problems with the help of those offices.

In cooperation with the International Labour Organization, we have taken effective measures to eradicate child labour and forced labour. Following the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Al Hussein, a programme of measures to strengthen guarantees for the protection of human rights was developed. We have abolished outdated legacies of the past such as exit visas, which impeded the freedom of movement. An open dialogue with national and international non-governmental organizations on the protection of human rights is being intensified.

Proceeding from the principles of humanism, many individual cases of detained persons have been reviewed. Misguided citizens who fell under the influence of the ideology of extremism are undergoing social rehabilitation, and conditions are being created for their return to normal life. The activities of all law-enforcement agencies in terms of protection of human rights and freedoms are under constant parliamentary and civil supervision.

The role of political parties and civil society is growing, and the genuine independence of the judiciary is being ensured. The role of the mass media has significantly increased. The most important direction for reforms is the liberalization of our economic system and the creation of a favourable investment climate. We base ourselves on one simple truth: the richer the people are, the stronger the State will be.

Since the beginning of the month, Uzbekistan has completely switched to a system of free conversion of the national currency. Along with that, all the necessary measures have been taken to mitigate any possible negative consequences for the population. For the first time, an institute of the ombudsman for the protection

of the rights of entrepreneurs was established. Taxes on business were significantly reduced. Access of business to credit was expanded. New free economic zones have been launched, where investors are granted extensive benefits. Cooperation with international financial institutions is being successfully developed, and partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has been renewed. I want to note that the contents of the strategy are fully consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

We are convinced that the United Nations must continue to play a central role in international relations. Uzbekistan champions its gradual reform. We believe that, in keeping with the realities of the modern world, the Security Council needs to be expanded. We support the steps taken by the new leadership of the United Nations to improve its management system. I want to reaffirm that Uzbekistan will continue its close partnership with United Nations structures. We are determined to ensure the practical implementation of the road map that was developed following the recent visit of the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, to Uzbekistan.

Today Uzbekistan considers the region of Central Asia the main priority for its foreign policy, and that is a conscious choice. Lying at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is keenly interested in seeing the region become a zone of stability, sustainable development and good-neighbourliness. A peaceful and economically prosperous Central Asia is our most important goal and key task.

Uzbekistan is determined to engage in dialogue, constructive interaction and strengthening good-neighbourliness. We are open to reasonable compromise with the countries of Central Asia on all issues without exception. Thanks to joint efforts in the region in recent months, political confidence has significantly increased. Fundamentally important decisions on many issues have been made.

The signing of the treaty on the State border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in early September was a truly landmark event. A breakthrough in that very sensitive issue, achieved for the first time in 26 years, became possible as a result of the political will demonstrated by both parties and their readiness to find mutually acceptable solutions. In a word, an absolutely new political atmosphere has been created in the region in a short period.

I believe that holding regular consultation meetings of the heads of Central Asian States would facilitate the consolidation of this trend. We intend to discuss the fundamental problems of the region at the high-level international conference on the theme "Central Asia: one past and common future, cooperation for sustainable development and mutual prosperity", to be held in November in Samarkand under the auspices of the United Nations. Based on its results, we intend to make a proposal on the adoption of a special General Assembly draft resolution in support of the efforts of Central Asia to ensure security and enhancing regional cooperation. We count on support for that proposal by the leadership of the United Nations and the international community.

When speaking about the problems of ensuring security and stability in Central Asia, one cannot overlook an issue as important as the joint use of the region's shared water resources. We fully share the position of the Secretary-General that the problems of "water, peace and security are inextricably linked" (*S/PV.7959, p. 2*). I am convinced that there is no alternative to addressing the problem of water besides equally taking into account the interests of the countries and nations of the region. Uzbekistan supports the draft conventions on the use of water resources of the Amudarya and Syrdarya river basins, which were developed by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy.

I would like to once again draw the Assembly's attention to one of the most acute environmental problems of our time: the Aral Sea catastrophe. I am holding a map showing the Aral Sea tragedy — I believe that words are not necessary. Overcoming the consequences of the drying up of the sea requires the active consolidation of international efforts. We stand for the full implementation of the special United Nations programme to provide effective assistance to the population affected by the Aral Sea crisis, which was adopted this year.

The stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan is an important precondition to ensure not only regional security, but global security as well. We are convinced that the only way to peace in Afghanistan is a direct dialogue between the central Government and the main domestic political forces, held without preconditions. The negotiations should be Afghan-led, held on the territory of Afghanistan and under the auspices of the United Nations. The wise Afghan people have the right

to independently define their own destiny. We support the appeal of the Administration of United States President Donald Trump to Afghanistan's neighbouring States to promote the peace process and an inter-Afghan settlement. Uzbekistan will continue to contribute to the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, as well as to the development of its transport and energy infrastructure and the training of national personnel. I am convinced that Afghanistan must remain at the heart of the global agenda. The efforts of the international community should primarily be aimed at resolving the acute social and economic problems of Afghanistan. Our common determination to promote peace in such a long-suffering country should not wane.

The aggravation of terrorist threats in the world, especially in recent years, indicates that the use of primarily forceful methods of counteraction is not justified. Often, efforts are reduced to combating the consequences of challenges, rather than addressing their root causes. I believe that, along with other factors, ignorance and intolerance are at the heart of international terrorism and extremism. In that regard, the most important task is to fight for the minds of people, especially young people. Most of the crimes linked with extremist activity and violence are committed by the people under the age of 30. Today's youth is the largest generation in the history of humankind, totalling 2 billion people. The planet's future and well-being depend upon what kind of people our children will grow up to be.

Our task is to provide conditions for the self-realization of the youth and create a barrier against the spread of the virus of the ideology of violence. We believe that, in order to achieve that, we need to develop necessary multilateral cooperation in the sphere of social support of the younger generation and bolster the protection of their rights and interests. In that regard, Uzbekistan proposes to develop a United Nations international convention on the rights of youth, which would constitute a unified, international legal instrument aimed at the development and implementation of youth policy, taking into account the conditions of globalization and the rapid development of information and communication technologies. In our opinion, States that accede to the convention would make firm commitments in order to raise the level of awareness with regard to one of the main, vital priorities of their social policies.

We consider communicating the humanistic essence of Islam to the broader world community to be one of the most important tasks at hand. We cherish our sacred religion as the focal point of time-honoured values. We strongly condemn and will never agree with those who equate our great faith with violence and bloodshed. Islam calls upon us to be kind and peaceful. It calls for the preservation of genuine humanity. I would like to especially note the invaluable contribution of a whole line of outstanding members of the Central Asian renaissance to the development of the Islamic and world civilization. One of them, Muhammad al-Bukhari, is acclaimed all over the world as the author of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the second-most important book in Islam after the Qur'an. In order to preserve and study his richest legacy and disseminate his teachings on enlightened Islam, we decided to establish the Imam Al-Bukhari International Research Center in Samarkand. The activities of the Center for Islamic Civilization, which is being established in Tashkent, will contribute to the implementation of that task.

I would like to address the participants at this meeting with a proposal to adopt a special draft resolution of the General Assembly on education and religious tolerance. Its main goal would be to promote universal access to education and eradicate illiteracy and ignorance. It would be designed to promote tolerance and mutual respect, ensure religious freedom, protect the rights of believers and prevent discrimination against them.

While steadfastly maintaining its non-aligned status, Uzbekistan is open to dialogue. We are interested in expanding cooperation with all partners in the name of peace, progress and prosperity. We see that cooperation as a vital precondition for the successful implementation of the most important tasks of reform carried out in our country, the main focus of which is people, their needs and their interests.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sargsyan (*spoke in Armenian; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): I congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajcák on his election and wish him success in his duties as the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I also take this opportunity once again to congratulate Mr. António Guterres upon his appointment as Secretary-General. We wish him success in carrying out his important duties. Armenia supports the priorities that Secretary-General Guterres has declared.

In 2017, we mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Armenia's accession to the United Nations. On 2 March 1992, the Armenian tricolour started flying at United Nations Headquarters, the logical and desired outcome of the Armenian people's quest to exercise their fundamental right to self-determination. Over the years, Armenia became a full-fledged, responsible member of the international community. We faced numerous challenges, but we withstood them with dignity. The Nagorno Karabakh conflict was the most important and daunting one. This is the fifth time that I speak from this rostrum, and again I need to address the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. I would have preferred to talk of peace, progress and cooperation but, unfortunately, we are still far from that stage. Hence, it is my duty to explain why we are so far from that desirable point.

The new phase of the Artsakh people's struggle for self-determination began almost 30 years ago. The Armenians of Artsakh used peaceful calls to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. Azerbaijan has always responded to such calls with the use of force. The policy of the Baku Government culminated in the massacre, ethnic cleansing and mass deportation of the Armenian population of Azerbaijan. Districts with once-flourishing Armenian populations are now devoid of Armenians, and the Government of Azerbaijan continues with its policy of systematically destroying the vast Armenian cultural and spiritual heritage on the territories under its control. It is obvious that in those circumstances the people of Artsakh have had no other choice than to resort to self-defence. Azerbaijan did not learn any lessons from the perilous war of 1992-1994, its aftermath and negotiations. Last year in April, Azerbaijan unleashed a four-day war, which proved that Azerbaijan's objective is to exterminate the people of Artsakh.

In the course of the military hostilities, the Azerbaijan armed forces committed a number of war crimes against the civilian population and prisoners of war. I find it worth mentioning that one serviceman who committed such atrocities received a high State award, and the President of Azerbaijan personally decorated him in front of the cameras.

For years hate speech against Armenians was made part and parcel of the Azerbaijan State policy. It is firmly part of its school curriculums and poisons the upbringing and thinking of its younger generation. For years a number of intergovernmental and other specialized organizations dealing with racism and xenophobia have raised the alarm.

All of this leads us to the conclusion that the Artsakh people's exercise of the right to self-determination is of vital importance. In that regard, I express the views of Armenia, the Artsakh and of all Armenians all over the globe. I bring this message from Yerevan, where the sixth Armenia diaspora conference is currently taking place.

Everyone should be aware that for the Artsakh people, who are building democracy, Azerbaijan simply symbolizes medieval backwardness. Azerbaijan has no legal or moral grounds whatsoever to present any claims on Artsakh. Artsakh has never been part of independent Azerbaijan, and it is not fair to attempt to annex Artsakh to that State order. Today free Artsakh is an established democratic society. Our shared motto and commitment of leaving no one behind should be the hallmark guiding the work of the United Nations family. For that very reason, I believe that the people of Artsakh should never be excluded from the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I strongly believe that the unresolved status of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict should have no impact on

the people of Artsakh as they exercise their rights. It is, first and foremost, about the inalienable rights of any human being, the right to life, to organize public life, to freely form one's own Government, to communicate unimpededly with the outer world, and about many other rights. Armenia consistently contributes and will contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the Artsakh people and to its sustainable and democratic development. No one has a right to create hindrances to the implementation of initiatives and projects to that effect. The legal status of Artsakh, or, to be more precise, the lack of international legal recognition, is not an impediment to the exercise of the rights of the men and women living there.

We strongly believe that there is no alternative to a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Right now, from this rostrum, I reiterate our commitment to that effect. Meanwhile, everyone should be aware that the Nagorno Karabakh issue is a human rights issue, one that can be resolved exclusively through one of the fundamental and inalienable human rights — the people's right to self-determination. At the end of the day, whatever option for resolving the conflict we arrive at, the Republic of Artsakh should not enjoy a status and liberty inferior to the one it enjoys today. Azerbaijan will recognize and respect the right of the people of Artsakh to decide their own future through the free expression of their will. All available international and domestic mechanisms should guarantee the security of the Armenian population of Artsakh. All remaining issues are collateral in nature and will be resolved in a logical and fair manner in conjunction with the general resolution process.

When I last spoke from this rostrum and addressed the process of international recognition of the Armenian genocide (see A/71/PV.17), I considered it my duty to express our gratitude to all those nations, one by one, that had recognized the horrendous crime that was committed against my people by the Ottoman Empire. It is my duty to express gratitude here to all those countries that displayed honour and responsibility by recognizing, or reiterating their position on, the Armenian genocide. I thank them for that initiative, regardless of the format and language adopted. I thank the numerous countries and individuals, State bodies, regional entities and organizations that called things by their proper names. That is indeed important, since denial paves the way for new crimes of genocide. In that context, we recall that next year the United Nations family will mark the seventieth anniversary of the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Armenia will propose a new initiative on that occasion, and we invite everyone to join us and support it.

Nevertheless, we have never made recognition of the Armenian genocide a precondition for the normalization of bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey. Moreover, it was at the initiative of Armenia that a normalization process was launched, resulting in the conclusion of the Zurich protocols in October 2009. Those documents have not been ratified thus far; instead they have been left in some dark drawer in Ankara. The Government of Turkey came up with preposterous preconditions for their ratification that run counter to the letter and spirit of the protocols. I expressed the clear-cut views of the Armenian people on that issue three years ago (see A/69/PV.6), when I spoke from this rostrum. Now the time is ripe for additional explanations.

The leadership of Turkey is mistaken if it thinks that it can keep those documents hostage forever and ratify them only at the most opportune occasion from its point of view. The protocols were negotiated in the existing circumstances at the time in order to find solutions to the then existing issues. Armenia will declare those two protocols null and void, since there has been no progress towards their implementation. We will enter the spring of 2018 without those, as our experience has demonstrated, futile Protocols.

Armenia nevertheless continues to believe that any two neighbouring States need to establish and enjoy normal relations in order to address any possible disagreement between them and find solutions. That is the credo we are guided by in our engagement with various integration processes. Armenia today is an active member of the Eurasian Economic Union and spares no effort in contributing to the unimpeded movement of goods and services in that large economic area. In that way, we promote welfare for all. We have already registered certain achievements in that regard, and that makes us feel hopeful for the future. We also plan to conclude an Armenia-European Union comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement in November, which, in our view, will help give new impetus to the institutional reforms being implemented in Armenia.

The current instability in the Middle East regretfully remains as a serious challenge. It is with great pain that we have been following the crisis in Syria and the humanitarian situation there, which has brought about the suffering of the civilian population, including the country's Armenian community. Armenia is doing what it can to mitigate the suffering of the Syrian people by providing humanitarian assistance. We also express our willingness to engage in possible discussions on the peacemaking efforts in Syria under the United Nations auspices and with an appropriate mandate.

I have no doubt that the United Nations family can ensure the needed cooperation to address modern global and regional challenges. It is with that objective in mind that Armenia participates in a number of the United Nations peacekeeping operations. Moreover, we stand ready to increase our contribution in Lebanon and Mali — respectively, to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

As a landlocked country with scarce natural resources located in a complex region, Armenia has continuously emphasized that it considers human beings to be its most valuable resource. That is indeed the case both for Armenia and for the whole United Nations family — we should focus on people and we should strive for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Armenia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, President of the Republic of Costa Rica

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Costa Rica.

Mr. Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Solís Rivera (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica congratulates the President on his election and welcomes the priorities that he has established for his tenure. I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to working with him and all Member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to help swiftly honour the pledges made in Paris and Marrakesh to mitigate climate change, to implement the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and to strengthen global governance and multilateralism as areas of supreme importance for the maintenance of international peace and stability.

I also wish to convey a message of solidarity and sympathy to the people and the Government of Mexico for the human and material losses resulting from the earthquake that struck its capital and surrounding areas today.

Every word, statement and action adopted in this Hall keeps alive Kant's hope and inspiring confidence in humankind. To build a world based on the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the treaties on the non-proliferation of weapons and the treaties on nuclear disarmament and prohibition is an acknowledgement of the multiple challenges that human communities face. They also evoke our sincere conviction in reaching globally agreed responses to the most urgent threats to humankind.

Those milestones are recent pieces in the renowned understanding of those who, before us and in pressing circumstances, fought for dignified coexistence, for freedom as a life-long mandate and for keeping hope alive as a daily imperative. Our duty as leaders consists in leading our nations towards sustainable human development. Therein lies the ethical power of our actions, both in domestic affairs and in the Assembly — the importance of which calls for an active commitment to ensure the well-being of our nations and to fight against inequality, injustice and violence. It means inconveniencing those who are opposed to the world being a radiant, open and unbiased hearth for us all, rather than a free aspiration of resistance and misunderstanding.

In the face of that wall of short-sightedness or malice, Costa Rica has always chosen honest work — the tireless ability to provide for one another with generosity, despite our small size. My country has chosen compassion, solidarity and peacebuilding as

the main values in fully respecting human rights. In that framework, it has made international law, active multilateralism and the rejection of environmental destruction as the ideal mechanisms for resolving conflicts domestically and among States. That, in short, will always be our commitment to humankind.

In September 2016, Costa Rica became the first country to enter into a national pact to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the concrete step of involving representatives at the highest levels in the country, local representatives and representatives from the business sector, churches, social organizations and academia — all of which have actively committed to seeking the implementation of those comprehensive goals. Through that initiative, we have aligned our 2015-2018 national development plan with the Sustainable Development Goals and the sectoral goals of national and local programmes and projects. Additionally, we established a functional strategy for the planning, implementation and monitoring of those goals — which operates on the basis of consultation, dialogue and accountability.

Two years ago, I stated in this very Hall (see A/70/PV.19) that Costa Rica would commit to the design and implementation of the adequate instruments to wage a real and sustainable campaign against poverty. Given its multidimensional character, we adopted a multidimensional poverty index along with a multi-actor functional governance structure, which was one of the most important factors in the poverty reduction achieved for the first time in seven years in Costa Rica — through a coordinated and structured ownership in decision-making, initiative design and strategy implementation at a national level.

In the same vein, Costa Rica and 42 other countries gathered here presented a voluntary national report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development of the United Nations. Moreover, Costa Rica and the other States members of the Central American Integration System sponsored the harmonization of the regional Central America agenda with the same objectives.

Costa Rica has understood and taken on the integrated universal and multidimensional nature of the SDGs. We therefore believe that its implementation requires policy and public management innovation. Leaving no one behind is a State and Government responsibility, but those entities cannot act alone. That is why the 2030 Agenda must be based on consensus, the creation of synergies and the creative participation and commitment of various actors and productive sectors — above all, in the commitment and call to action of the Assembly. Leaving no one behind is more than just a slogan, it is a forceful call to action for all the segments that make up our societies. That is why I commend the contents and the quality of the Secretary-General's report for the repositioning of the United Nations development system so as to honour the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda.

I believe that is the appropriate path to coordinate and carry out comprehensive actions that respond to the current and future needs of sustainable development. In that regard, we must consider the needs of middle-income countries. I believe it is advisable to continue the efforts carried out thus far and to continue to promote the interests of middle-income countries, with a view to the United Nations offering them more efficient, targeted and better coordinated support.

Costa Rica wishes to stress the importnace of countries and the United Nations system reconsidering the concept of per capita income as the gauge for determining a country's progress. Only a multidimensional view of development, especially a multidimensional view of poverty, will allow us to understand the needs of the people and families and the individuals that make it up, as it relates to access to health care, the elimination of inequality, promoting gender equality and attention to social, economic and environmental weakness, among other challenges of developing nations.

With due respect but also with urgency, I call on the Secretary-General to promote open spaces to establish work strategies that would strengthen the capacities of such countries and allow them to cooperate more effectively with other middle-income countries and with less-developed countries. For those countries, reaching the Sustainable Development Goals will be impossible unless economic, social and environmental problems are incorporated into a path of comprehensive action.

As a universal forum, the United Nations has a privileged position for consolidating the consultation process of middle-income countries. Amartya Sen has said with incontrovertible authority that to speak of the development of a particular society, we must analyse the lives of those who live within it, and that

there can be no economic success without considering the quality of life of communities, which is one and the same with that of each of its members. That thesis gives special attention to minority groups that have been historically excluded from fully exercising their rights and denied the understanding of the societies in which they live — especially if their nature requires the adoption of targeted processes in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

That complexity requires taking a closer look at productive sectors, such as family agriculture — the primary source of income for 70 per cent of the global rural population, that is, 40 per cent of the global population. Close to 500 million small farms provide 80 per cent of the food consumed by the developing world. In many cases, they are the historical basis for the productive development of entire nations, as is the case in my country. Family agriculture has a crucial role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as it integrates the goals and is the basis for the sustainable production of food, for the environmental management of rural and marine territory and for biodiversity — as a source of significant cultural expressions of each people. It is, without a doubt, a fundamental pillar of the integrated development of nations. In that regard, alongside a group of countries from different parts of the world, Costa Rica will be honoured to present a draft resolution at the current session to declare the decade of family agriculture 2019-2028 — inspired by the success of the International Year of Family Agriculture, adopted by the Assembly in 2014 as resolution 66/222.

Gender equality continues to be a goal of quintessential importance in all nations. Every day, more women strive to be fully recognized and to exercise their rights. Their struggle is inherent in the building of truly democratic societies and of peaceful coexistence in all countries. Moreover, without equal rights for women, it will be impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the target date set by the Organization.

The literature is vast and the political declarations are forceful in highlighting the noticeable democratic gaps and the resulting detriment to development due to the persistence of patriarchal and chauvinist structures forged in another time but revived today absent education regarding human rights and respect for democratic coexistence. Gender inequality is not a topic that is foreign to us, nor a phenomenon that unfolds covertly in the internal relations of countries beyond our purview, but rather it is occurring in front of our very eyes. Let us take a moment to look around us. It is imperative to take joint action to ensure that equality in this important organ. My country has understood that commitment and welcomes work proposals from International Gender Champions that seek to revert the trend of gender inequality within the United Nations and to take concrete actions for the seventy-second session by calling on the Gender Champions to promote equilibrium within each delegation that attends the general debate during the Assembly's week of high-level debate.

Women's effective participation in the economic sectors of their societies has a deep and significant impact on other areas of independence, as an economically empowered woman is a person with the tools and capabilities necessary to make a positive impact on her community and her family. While it is true that many women work, are entrepreneurs, are employed in the public and private sectors and are scientists and artists, millions of others work in the informal sector or do domestic work and unpaid care. It is estimated that women's unpaid work is equivalent to $10 billion per year, or 13 per cent of the global gross domestic product. However, if I were to choose a single insulting and absurd example of this discrimination, the one that angers me the most is that the average woman's salary is 25 per cent lower the average man's salary for the same job.

I had the honour to co-chair the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, along with Ms. Simona Scarpaleggia, Chief Executive Officer of IKEA Switzerland, at the request of former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN-Women. The final report of the Panel, in which women from the entire world participated, concluded,

> "that it is essential to expand social protection coverage and access to justice with due process; that care is also an economic activity whose contribution should be reflected in countries' productivity; that men should share responsibility for fulfilling this work and private companies and public institutions are called on to encourage it; that women have the challenge of accessing digital and financial services, as well as of being deed owners in land redistribution; that companies must recognize women's leadership; that it is urgent that States' macroeconomic policies empower

women and promote decent jobs for them; that laws that discriminate must be amended and others that encourage equality must be enacted; that affirmative policies on hiring women must be extended to public institutions and private companies and women-owned businesses must be promoted; and that it is necessary to reinforce support to informal women workers and women agricultural workers".

Of course, we must adopt a multidimensional and intersectoral strategy to address the barriers to women's economic empowerment. In that regard, Costa Rica has in place a public policy that guarantees women's employability on an equal basis. The main objective of this policy is to eliminate women's lack of access to, and permanence in, the workplace. The private sector is the key actor in that, as it is the main source of employment and national development. This practice is part of the new trend in international markets and the global economy, where companies seek to increase their productivity through innovation, the improvement of the work environment, the attraction of talent and the adoption of values and practices based on human rights.

Nevertheless, we recognize that multiple challenges remain to making progress towards substantive equality for women. We are determined to incorporate women in paid work, with measures that eradicate gender-based division in the workplace and facilitate economic independence and quality of life as necessary conditions for the full enjoyment of human rights.

With the Assembly's permission, for just a moment, I would like to convey this message in English to all the women who, with their work, raise up their families and local and national communities.

(*spoke in English*)

Today I extend my recognition to all women on Earth. They are capable enough to move ahead despite the rigid and rude patriarchal heritage that tends to not acknowledge their abilities and accomplishments and that fills with doubts and dangers their road towards full autonomy. They are an example for others: their internal strength leads them to break the chains of oppression, rise above the misery of migration and forced displacement and free entire communities from various forms of slavery. And in the grim march of their lives, they devote themselves with great passion to their people; they are sensitive and protective even when their love and generosity are not understood or repaid. They are masters of resilience, since they have learned how to deal with bad people and painful moments. They know how to fulfil their roles of mother, partner, friend or leader, and they dedicate themselves to them even if they need to sacrifice themselves because of a superior responsibility, a greater good that they accomplish with sincere devotion, aware of the risks and bearing in mind that they are an example to other women that follow in their steps.

Definitely, it is not easy being a Khaleesi. Whether in fiction or in real life, the goal of equality is much greater than what our circumstances relegate us to. Today is a good day to look at ourselves in the mirror, start to create truly equal relations and bring this long night to an end.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

My generation's grandparents could not have foreseen the consequences that industrialization and business models would have on the climate. We, the grandparents of future generations, can. That is why we cannot be indifferent. It is true that for decades humankind has had the resources and scientific knowledge to precisely measure the behaviour of endless variables related to the environment and that it can project future scenarios for weather conditions in different parts of the world and the impact they would have on humans and their social, productive and cultural activities. These capabilities commit us at levels seldom encountered throughout the history of humankind. They saddle us with an ethical and moral responsibility about the future of life on Earth and the terms of the interactions among human groups and between humans and their environment.

There is enough evidence to support the idea that a transformative solution to climate change is within human capabilities. That is why we welcome the French initiative of a global pact for the environment, which would complement the legal framework of the international agreements adopted by the United Nations in 1966. We are also pleased to be a member of the group of friends, which under the leadership of Slovenia, Switzerland, Morocco and Maldives, promotes the draft resolution on human rights and the environment that is being coordinated in the Human Rights Council. Also, along with countries of the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean, we have exercised a positive leadership position in the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change, building bridges between negotiating groups and making proposals.

Our countries must adopt increasingly ambitious positions on environmental conservation and in the fight against climate change and understand the right to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment as an essential right of every human being and of future generations. The international community can count on the unconditional and unrestricted support of the Costa Rican people and Government in promoting this vital agenda. It is my pleasure to inform the plenary that, with the shared leadership of Chile and Costa Rica, Latin America is moving towards establishing a regional instrument on the rights of access to information, participation and justice on environmental matters. The initiative aims to produce more effective agreements in the context of socio-environmental conflicts through an environmental governance programme in which the State acts as a facilitator in agreement and decision-making spaces with the participation of all interested and affected stakeholders. It includes the principles of precaution, reparation and non-regression.

We reaffirm our intention to guide our economy towards carbon neutrality, as part of the pre-2020 voluntary actions, and we are expanding our long-term commitments towards the in-depth decarbonization of the economy. Our electrical grid continues to be an example of planning and renewable energy use for the world, thanks to long periods of energy generation based solely on renewable sources — in water, wind, geothermal sources, biomass and sunlight. In addition to the offsetting process of our forests, we are reducing emissions in critical sectors, such as transport, livestock and waste. We have set an absolute emission limit for 2030 that is equivalent to a 25 per cent decrease in emissions as compared with 2012. That places us in a privileged position to become a green centre for management, innovation and knowledge transfer. We invite our strategic partners to join this effort.

It is clear that we cannot not improve the health of our oceans if we do not change our land production and consumption. In that regard, our recently issued national wastewater sanitation policy and our national strategy for plastics replacement seek to stop pollution resulting from land-based activities and reverse their cumulative effects. To that end, straws, coffee stirrers and plastic containers are to be replaced. In addition, we are working to end destructive fishing practices and to coordinate efforts so that coastal populations can develop from the use and sustainable management of marine-coastal resources.

Along the same conservation lines, we presented our national wetlands policy, which seeks to ecologically rehabilitate the Costa Rican wetland ecosystems and to promote actions for their sustainable and participatory use, as well as the establishment of a framework planned over the long term in order to restore the national wetland systems and ensure its responsible use in order to contribute to improving the quality of life of the communities that use it.

We believe that all those efforts not only encourage a focus on and the mitigation of climate change, but they also have an impact on human rights and public policies that promote gender equality, non-discrimination and the enjoyment of the rights of indigenous peoples. That is why we also welcome the process to prepare the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the global compact on refugees.

In that regard, I would like to recall the principle of the progressivity of human rights — an essential principle that implies expanding the range of rights granted, from which we cannot go back. But above all, it entails the idea that we are called on to provide our inhabitants with increasingly more and better guarantees that allow the free and full exercise of each of those rights.

The twentieth century witnessed some of the greatest and most atrocious conflicts that humankind has experienced. The end of the Second World War marked an even greater threat, one with the potential to destroy our species. The nuclear arms race was, for much of the second half of the last century, a constant concern that threatened the continuance of the human family.

Costa Rica views with great concern the events developing on the Korean peninsula. The increase in the warmongering rhetoric on that part of the Asian continent implies a serious and real threat to the peace and stability not only of the region, but of the world. Costa Rica is amazed by how, almost three decades after the end of the Cold War, ghosts that we thought had been banished forever reappeared in a world where there is need for more medicine, not rifles, more schools, not barracks, and more projects to provide drinkable water than facilities to produce weapons of mass destruction.

That is why we strongly and vehemently condemn the nuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We will always support dialogue, active diplomacy and multilateralism. We call on the parties involved and on the Security Council to take an active role in avoiding escalations of tension that could lead to dire consequences and from which there is a risk of no return. We cannot remain silent or stand idly by. Therefore, together with the Secretary-General, we demand that the Security Council act immediately, as is its responsibility, to contain this situation.

We view with hope, joy and pride the fact that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was finally approved in July of this year. I congratulate Costa Rican Ambassador Elayne Whyte on that process. As President of the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, she led the process with courage and great skill. That effort, together with that of the participating delegations, made a dream come true after more than seven decades.

The Treaty is a strong message that most States Members of the United Nations do not support, do not accept and do not consider nuclear weapons as legitimate, and that the international community clearly states that nuclear weapons are not only immoral, ethically repugnant, but are, henceforth, illegal. A new norm of international law that absolutely prohibits nuclear weapons in all circumstances is therefore established and provides a solid and legally binding framework for the destruction and total elimination of nuclear weapons in a transparent, irreversible and verifiable manner within specified time frames.

As an unarmed democracy that bases its defence entirely on international law, we are satisfied that, in addition to prohibiting the development, production, manufacture, transfer, possession, storage, location, installation and deployment of nuclear weapons, the Treaty explicitly prohibits the threat of its use, thereby also banning so-called nuclear deterrence security doctrines.

Many will say that this entire effort is meaningless, since none of the nuclear Powers wanted to be part of it. With respect, I tell them they are wrong. The desire of the 122 countries that approved the text of the Treaty is the legitimate voice of peoples who love peace and defend humankind. Any effort to support disarmament will never be pointless. Supporting peace will never be a mistake. Costa Rica applauds those 122 countries and all those that will sign the Treaty tomorrow, and urgently calls on others to join in signing it, so that we can ensure a future for us and for those who will come after us so that we can continue to build the world we are dreaming of.

Costa Rica is constantly shocked by the terrorist attacks that unfortunately happen everywhere in the world almost every week of the year. Once again, we want to express our absolute and unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, no matter who commits it, wherever it is committed or whatever its purpose, and we stress the need to bring its perpetrators to justice. The fight against terrorism must be framed in strict observance of international law, including human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law.

I wish to emphasize the crucial role of international law as a legitimate mechanism for settling disputes among States, which we must resolve. In that regard, considering that unilateral economic sanctions are not efficient ways to punish Governments but can seriously harm the rights of peoples to well-being and development, I once again would like to express the opposition of my country to the embargo that the United States has imposed against Cuba for 55 years, with high human, economic and social costs for its population.

Sixty-nine years ago Costa Rica decided to exchange weapons and soldiers for notebooks and teachers. Sixty-nine years ago Costa Rica decided to establish, strengthen and promote international law as the civilized way to resolve its differences with others. Today, 69 years later, Costa Rica continues to believe that.

The original goal of the creation of the United Nations was to save future generations from the scourge of war. The world has changed in a dizzying way since 1945. The threats and challenges to peace, stability and global security are increasingly diverse and complex. However, there is something that has not changed one iota: the intrinsic and natural impulse to strive untiringly towards the most dignified and highest universal values based on law and towards the prevalence of institutions over brute force, of multilateralism over smaller, narrower and pettier national interests. That is the essence of this institution: to achieve the well-being of all nations as a whole by sustaining peace in each of them. It is not the opposite. It is not to achieve the well-

being of each nation in order to achieve global well-being, but rather it is in the world's interest to uphold the interests and well-being of our individual nations.

The Andalusian poet Federico García Lorca said that theatre is the poetry that rises from the page and becomes human, and becoming human, speaks and yells, cries and despairs. It is our duty now to take action based on our rhetoric and to go out into the world and make it all possible. We must restore hope to the hearts of the world's citizens and ensure that that hope leads to a life of dignity that enables them to fully enjoy their rights and freedoms. The fight to uphold human rights is historic and long-standing endeavour. Never before have the levels of education and peace been so high and the number of conflicts so low. That does not mean that we should reduce our mobilization efforts and become complacent. It means that, in spite of it all and although war and structural violence still plague many regions of the world, human society remains on the right path, in no small measure due to the Organization's efforts.

We own our future. In spite of the pain caused by injustice and perpetual and pervasive irrational behaviour, there are more people who believe that happiness, solidarity, freedom, justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation are possible — many more than those who promote death, pain, torture and militarization and spread fear, which all thwart our beautiful creative capacity.

This will be the last time that I address the Assembly as President of Costa Rica. Next year, as my country fulfils a decades-old civic duty yet again, my people will send a new representative to address an Organization of which we are so proud. That will happen repeatedly in future because a democracy's presidential mandate calls for the perpetual renewal of its leadership. I have been pondering this moment for several months. On behalf of all representatives and their children, I would like to dedicate these closing words to my sons and daughters.

Future generations also deserve to be acknowledged in this universal forum because, in many ways, they are the beneficiaries of the solutions their parents brought to the table, both metaphorically and in the deepest human sense. I would like Mónica, Cristina, Beatriz, Diego, Ignacio and little Inés to know that each time a father or mother steps up to this rostrum to promote peace and justice, reconciliation and solidarity, it is with them and their present and future in mind. I would like them to know that each time a father or mother takes the floor to promote human rights, gender equality and the importance of protecting the environment from the irrational forces of human greed or consumerism, they do it out of deep concern for their well-being and that of future generations. I would like them to also know that their father, and before him other Costa Rican mothers and fathers who stood before the Assembly, did so proud to represent a people who are full of dignity, hard working and courageous. They clamour for peace and seek to build it day by day. They will always uphold human rights as our universal family's highest good. That should make them proud and happy. They should be proud to be part of an ongoing story that, like the waves of the ocean will happen time and again, just as the world continues to have hopes and dreams for human progress. They should be happy because they know that our efforts to promote justice and peace have not been and will not be in vain.

I hope that the United Nations will continue to be the preferred forum for fostering understanding among the peoples of the world. It will not be a conflict-free environment because, unfortunately, that is not our species' default state, but it could be a meeting point where people can reach agreement, based on the higher aspirations of human progress that makes survival possible. I also hope that this session can shed light on demilitarization and denuclearization, which are the only ways to ensure our survival, beyond all efforts to guarantee it.

I also sincerely hope, with all my heart and soul, that all nations represented here today are happy, at peace and able to adhere to the wise biblical admonition to beat swords into ploughshares. It is simply another way of saying love your neighbour as you love yourself.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Costa Rica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Uganda.

Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Museveni: I congratulate His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and assure him of Uganda's support. We are confident that he will lead the Assembly effectively and successfully. I would also like to express our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson for his leadership of the Assembly at its seventy-first session. I also pay tribute to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres for his personal dedication and commitment to the work of the United Nations.

The theme for this session, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", is very pertinent. I am happy this topic is being discussed. I have always wondered why the elites in the different countries of the world do not see its importance. Who would lose if everyone in the world led a decent life and every adult consumed between 2,000 and 2,500 calories per day? Who would lose if everyone were consuming the right number of calories every day? Who would lose if everyone were immunized against immunizable diseases? Who would lose if all the immunizable diseases that afflict people were immunized against? Who would lose if we were to achieve universal immunization for all the people in the world? What would be the problem? Who would lose if all young people, children, accessed education to achieve literacy, numeracy and skills, as a minimum? Who would lose if all human beings had health units within a radius of 5 kilometres from where they live? Who would lose if all human beings had access to clean electricity, away from charcoal, firewood and dirty kerosene? Who would lose if every adult had a well-paying job? Who would lose if every family on the globe had a decent, three-bedroom house? Who would lose if every person had access to clean water? Who would lose if no person on the globe had to worry about war, terrorism or crime? Who would lose if every provider of a service or producer of a good that is needed for use in the world had a right of access to markets? Who would lose if all the countries in the world had good transport and other elements of infrastructure? Who would lose if we all insisted on protecting Mother Nature so that it can also look after us?

To what extent would this effort at global affluence stimulate business? How much cement, steel, copper and food would we need? How would all that impact business? If we aimed at global affluence, how much would this impact business positively? Why, then, do we all have bad businessmen who do not have spectacles effective enough to see the implied business opportunities if we aim at global affluence? As a milk and beef producer myself, only a few months ago I was cautioning my fellow farmers against excessive greed as far as the price per litre of milk and per kilogram of beef were concerned. The farmers were trying to demand extremely high prices for beef and milk, but I warned them that if the milk were too expensive, the people might not buy it as much as if it were better priced. The more buyers we have for our products, the more prosperous we will be. We would therefore be both good businesspeople as well as good Christians, because we would be doing business in a fair way. Therefore, in my opinion, parasitism is the only obstacle to global affluence, prosperity and peace.

On the dangerous situation on the Korean peninsula, where very dangerous instruments of mass extermination are paraded around by the two contending sides, I have one question. My approach today is just to pose questions. I will not answer all of them, but I put them to the Assembly so that members can answer them themselves. I have one question. Who would lose if North Korea and South Korea, those kith and kin, were left alone to discuss their reunification? The Korean nation came into existence in 1234 A.D., according to the information available on the Internet. Why cannot these people — they are one people — discuss their reunification instead of maintaining a divided peninsula, the division of which it is our job to manage endlessly? Koreans were temporarily divided towards the end of the Second World War. Why should this division be allowed to be permanent and a source of dangerous tensions? A unified Korea would be a very strong nation. Why do some actors fear strong nations in the world? Why should the Koreans themselves, North and South, allow external forces to continue to divide them? We always strive not to allow actors, foreign or local, to divide the African peoples, regardless of the complications involved. When one hears that Uganda accommodates many African refugees, it is on account

of a conscious ideological position to not allow any actors to divide us. We fight only traitors. Who has been hurt by a unified Viet Nam since 1975, although the method of their unification was not the best one? Who has been hurt by the reunification of Germany since 1990?

Finally, on the small issue of enforcing sanctions against North Korea, Uganda is in compliance. That is not a big problem, for we do not have to trade with North Korea. We are, however, grateful that, in the past, the North Koreans helped us to build our tank forces.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Uganda for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.

United Nations A/72/PV.6

General Assembly
Seventy-second session

Official Records

6th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 19 September 2017, 6.10 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Laaksonen (Finland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6.10 p.m.

Address by Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Republic of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Republic of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sirisena (*spoke in Sinhalese; English text provided by the delegation*): I am very pleased to be able to congratulate the newly elected President of the General Assembly and to have the honour of addressing the Assembly at its seventy-second session, the third time I have done so as leader of Sri Lanka. The theme of this year's session is "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". Today, as we observe the various scenarios in play around the world, that slogan seems highly pertinent.

In 2015, before my election as President of Sri Lanka, I made a number of pledges to the people of my country. At that juncture, Sri Lanka's presidency had more executive power than the corresponding office in any other democratic system in the world. Since my election, the excessive executive powers of the presidency have been transferred to Parliament in accordance with my pledge. I believe that the concession and transfer by a leader of such power to another organ has set an example to my country and the world.

Those of us who are leaders of democratic countries must safeguard democracy and use our power to work to build a just society. However, events of the past few decades — indeed, of world history generally — have shown that many leaders are reluctant to yield power, resulting in discord, the disruption of peace and sometimes disputes at the international level as well. For myself, I have established democracy in my country and taken action to eliminate political groups with autocratic tendencies. I want to bring to the Assembly's attention my efforts to ensure democracy, safeguard human rights and nurture my people's fundamental rights during the past two and a half years.

My Government declared 2017 a year for poverty alleviation, with a view to freeing our country from the clutches of poverty, a major effort that I believe the entire world is engaged in. In that regard, we have launched a number of development programmes to strengthen the domestic economy.

We are all aware that for 30 years Sri Lanka suffered from a protracted conflict that crippled its

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economy. Terrorists advocating separatist ideologies wreaked havoc, but we were able to defeat them, establish democracy and begin to govern the country peacefully. But the economic legacy of the conflict was extremely detrimental to progress. We have learned the lessons of that conflict and are working to strengthen our domestic economy, promoting local industries and industrialization with a view to achieving economic development, while also fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals and making sustainable development a priority.

My country, like the rest of the world, including the United States of America, is being affected by unprecedented climate and weather conditions. In that regard, I believe that the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is crucial, and we should agree that ensuring its implementation is essential for humankind and the world.

Along with our national programme for poverty alleviation, I have launched a new movement, Grama Shakthi, as part of our clear vision and plan for consolidating the country's economy. We want to strengthen the local economy, develop local agriculture, take the country in a new direction and continue the economic plan between now and 2025 with rigour, with a view to achieving major changes in our economy.

As we know, children today are faced with many problems, not just in my country but all over the world. I have therefore launched a national programme in Sri Lanka to protect children. We have a mammoth task ahead of us in keeping our children safe from abuse and the drug manace. The protection of children is a matter of national and international importance, and implementing programmes to that end is therefore essential.

There is also much discussion in the world about protecting women's rights. A great deal of attention has been focused on the subject, and we have seen how women have been mistreated in certain societies. Women make up more than 52 per cent of Sri Lanka's population. We have worked to protect their rights by amending our Constitution to establish a mandatory 25 per cent quota for women candidates in local Government elections, one of several recently adopted amendments concerning major programmes, along with those protecting children and women's rights and preventing the threat posed by illegal drugs. We know that there is a need for an extensive global programme for preventing and controlling the threat posed by drugs. That issue has become a major challenge for every country and society, and I believe that all of humankind should join hands and come up with a joint programme to achieve that goal.

When my Government came to power in 2015, we were facing two major problems, one of which was our foreign debt crisis. Large sums of money were needed to repay our loans. On top of that, the Human Rights Council was considering allegations of human rights violations and raising serious concerns with regard to the then Government. Since then, however, we have been working to strengthen our domestic economy and attract foreign investment, and through these programmes have been successfully paying down our loans.

With regard to the resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council in connection with allegations of human rights violations, my Government is now dealing with the issue and making resolving those problems a priority.

Consolidating democracy and protecting and nurturing human and fundamental rights constitute the pillars on which my Government has based its successful leadership of Sri Lanka and its efforts to establish a democratic society, and we will continue to strengthen those elements in the future. We have also worked to strengthen national reconciliation. Sri Lanka is home to people with different languages and different faiths, and we want to establish fellow feeling among the various groups and eliminate hatred, suspicion and mistrust, while building a society that is free of such problems.

While we must work to strengthen our country's economy and thereby promote prosperity, we also want to build a country that is disciplined and has high moral standards. The rule of law is of major importance in that regard, and my Government has prioritized the task of establishing the rule of law and ensuring its application. I should therefore emphasize that, while we are strengthening democracy, at the same time we are working to promote our people's human rights, nurture their basic rights and maintain friendly relations with other countries. Despite the divisions that have existed between Sri Lanka and some of its powerful allies, today we maintain good relations with those countries, and we very much appreciate the assistance of the United Nations in that regard.

As a State Member of the United Nations for approximately 62 years, Sri Lanka has abided by its rules and regulations and complied with its conventions, treaties and agreements. As a country with such a track record of compliance as a Member of the United Nations, we want those good relations to continue.

I want to ensure my country's independence and sovereignty in all that we do. In addressing the various allegations that have been made against us and dealing with the related problems, we have to move slowly and with enormous care. In that regard, certain extremist elements expect a fast pace. They want quick, short-term solutions, but our country is dealing with the legacy of a war that dragged on for 30 years and divided its people. We want to establish peace and unity, promote brotherhood among our people and eliminate hatred, suspicion and mistrust. If we are to achieve that, to build up a loving country and promote a prosperous economy, the assistance of Member States is of paramount importance. That is why I say that ours is a slow and steady pace, and in that connection, we call on Member States for their help. I believe that a rapid pace would be perilous at this juncture and the quick solution expected by certain extremist elements would be unlikely to solve our complex problems. I believe that everyone would agree with me in that regard.

Preventing the recurrence of war and promoting a sense of brotherhood among the various groups in my country, while ensuring each group's right to speak its own language and worship according to its own faith, are among my Government's goals. I respectfully appeal to the United Nations and to every nation to support us in realizing those goals. We want to promote economic prosperity, democracy and an end to war, and we want to consolidate our democracy and set an example to other nations. I am asking for assistance in achieving those goals.

I would like to conclude by congratulating the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, and may the noble Triple Gem bless us all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Estonia.

Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Kaljulaid: Our world is unpredictable, and much of that unpredictability is the result of climate change. Climate change could be counterbalanced by rapid changes in our wasteful way of life, aided by technology. Clearly, although technological development — especially as it is illustrated by the rapidly developing digital technologies to which billions now have access — has a positive potential for transformation, it actually adds to the difficulties of understanding our future. This new world offers opportunities. Unfortunately, it also enhances the risks. To take advantage of the former and manage the latter, we need to take flexible and quick action, and on the global stage.

Estonia, a nation of just over 1 million inhabitants, is sensitive to the fact that those who are inherently weak — the poor, the disabled and the very young or very old — find it especially hard to cope with unpredictability. It is hard for those who have been rendered weak by discrimination, which is often the case for women and ethnic and religious minorities. Estonia itself has gone through a rapid transformation during the more than quarter century that has passed since it regained independence. As our economic and social statistics prove, we have done quite well in protecting our society's weaker groups, while rapidly adapting and growing our economy. We know it can be done.

We suffered for a long time from the international community's Hobbesian conviction that liberty could about bring chaos, and that bad leadership is better than no leadership. Our guiding principles have therefore been those of John Locke — the rule of law, checks and balances and individual rights. Notably, Locke had originally agreed with Hobbes, but changed his mind

while on a diplomatic mission observing civil society in Brandenburg, where, as he described it, differing ideas had the right to quietly coexist. That debate has continued into modern times.

We know how to offer our know-how on empathic, inclusive development at the global discussion table. Estonia is seeking election to the Security Council for the period from 2020 to 2021. As a small State that was occupied for 50 years of its 100-year history, Estonia is sensitive to the concerns of all States and people who lack the capacity to withstand global tides. Too many States in the world are suffering from unresolved conflicts, and they are States that could take care of their own peoples and contribute at the global level if we could more quickly manage the conflicts that are holding them back or, worse, threatening to tear them apart.

The ongoing military aggression in eastern Ukraine continues to stir up conflict and cause casualties among civilians, including the loss of a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. The Crimean peninsula is still occupied, as are parts of Georgia. There are protracted conflicts in Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh. Many countries have been torn apart by tensions that we recognized but could not dissipate in time to avoid the worst.

The world has lost half a million people in Syria. Estonia supports the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

We cannot overlook the escalating suffering of the people of Yemen, or ignore the fate of the Rohingya people. We must put more effort into humanitarian action to combat the hunger, diseases and epidemics looming in various countries. Our common efforts to combat famine and hunger will also be crucial in South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria.

Not every State is mobilizing its resources, efforts and technological advances for the benefit of its people. North Korea is an acute threat to world peace.

There are also considerable risks to global stability that are no longer linked to any specific State. The risk of terrorism is metastatic. Spawned initially by the disappointments and disillusionment of people from failed and failing States, it has spread globally. The key to successfully countering terrorism and violent extremism lies in our cooperation at all levels — national, regional and global. The Secretary-General's initiative to restructure the counter-terrorism architecture at the United Nations will render global efforts more coordinated and transparent. Effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are mutually reinforcing, not conflicting, goals.

What I have just mentioned — and which has already been exacerbated by the real effects of climate change and, unfortunately, will be even more so in the future — has led to the highest number of displaced people the world has ever seen. As with all global challenges, the United Nations is the natural entity for working out and agreeing on a solution. Last year, we adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. We must address the root causes and drivers of irregular migration in order to improve border management and fight human trafficking, while also facilitating opportunities for legal migration. I would like to emphasize that the underlying basic values of our joint endeavours are humanism and solidarity. For Estonia, the importance of empathy for refugees who are fleeing the atrocities of war and destruction is a bitter lesson from our own history, when occupations and the Second World War dispersed our people around the world.

If we want to deal with the root causes of migration, we must tackle climate change, which has become the defining issue of our time. Joint efforts to combat climate change on a global scale would not be possible without the coordinating role of the United Nations and the platform offered by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). We have confidence in the Fiji presidency's ability to achieve concrete results during the twenty-third session of the Parties to the UNFCCC, to be held in November, building on last year's achievements in Paris.

As the response led by society to the threats of climate change shows, big, universal problems can be tackled by inclusive societies. Inclusive societies are fundamental to empathic and inclusive development. However, in recent years we have witnessed a shrinking of the space available to civil society. That trend must be reversed. One of the most prominent guarantees for empathic and inclusive development in democracy and the rule of law is the mainstreaming of gender equality in all areas of life. It is a proven fact that treating women

and men equally has a multiplier effect in eradicating poverty. Estonia's welfare development plan for 2016-2023 covers policy areas from employment and social inclusion to equal opportunities for applying our talents in all walks of life. Our goal is the balanced participation of women and men at all levels of decision-making and management, in both the public and the private sectors.

We should also not forget about gender balance in conflict situations. Engaging women in the early stages of prevention, crisis resolution and peacebuilding helps to reduce the probability of a relapse into violent conflict. We should therefore encourage women's participation in peace processes and acknowledge them as actors of change with great potential. And we must be tireless in implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions on women and peace and security at every level. The Peacebuilding Commission's adoption of a gender strategy last year was a major milestone on that road.

If women are to fully play their role in society, it is crucial to eliminate gender-based violence. We should ensure that its survivors are treated with dignity and that its perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes. Estonia continues to support actions that address gender-based violence and the reproductive-health needs of women and adolescent girls who are particularly vulnerable — for example, via the United Nations Population Fund in Ukraine and by supporting the #shedecides initiative. I am convinced that Secretary-General Guterres' commendable effort to bring more women into United Nations decision-making will also be an inspiration to women globally, and have a tangible effect on United Nations policy development, making it more empathic and inclusive.

Today, the use of information technology and the Internet is part of the everyday lives of people everywhere. Estonia can share its experience on how best to utilize e-governance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals more efficiently and cheaply. We have been organizing an event series at the United Nations with the aim of introducing the well-established benefits of our e-governance to the international community, and we sincerely hope that they will lead to concrete action and partnerships. Moreover, this summer, Estonia and Singapore launched the Group of Friends on e-Governance and Cybersecurity. The Group's aim is to raise awareness, share best practices and promote capacity-building, at a time when such topics are becoming increasingly important at the United Nations level.

Digital change is everywhere. Its biggest effect right now is its ability to make geography obsolete. Attacks via cyberspace know no limits. Friendships and partnerships formed in the cybersphere know no borders. Globally, all these things diminish the distance between us. A digitally enhanced global civil society functions better if States provide their people with safe ways to communicate digitally. In the analogue world, it is easy to identify ourselves even to people we do not know, because States have provided us with passports. We need similar identification for the cybersphere, and yet too few Governments provide the means for safe identification. They should catch up and ensure that their people are protected and able to conduct transactions and communicate safely online.

Our greater dependence on electronic services has brought greater vulnerability in cyberspace, but that does not mean that we can, or should try, to stop digital progress. We should continue our efforts to analyse how international law applies to the use of information and communications technology, particularly with regard to the principle of due diligence, countermeasures, the potential application of the right to self-defence and international humanitarian law. I call on all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime. I would also like to underline the statement of the Freedom Online Coalition, expressing deep concern about the growing trend in intentional State-sponsored disruptions both of access to information online and its dissemination. No one should be denied the right to peaceful assembly or to freedom of association, opinion or expression, whether in real life or online.

In order to address all of those challenges successfully, we need a strong United Nations. Estonia welcomes the Secretary-General's agenda for United Nations reform and strongly supports efforts to link reform of the United Nations peace and security architecture with reform of its development system. We welcome the emphasis on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, which renders societies resilient to vulnerabilities.

Estonia's chairmanship of the Second Committee is firmly guided by the principles of inclusivity and empathy. It is in our common interests to ensure that the Second Committee tackles the global challenges

that fall under its remit. We count on members' good faith in achieving that.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

As a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, Estonia has been working closely with a number of countries to improve the working methods of the Security Council, and the functioning of the United Nations as a whole. We need empathy and inclusivity, including in the Security Council. That is why Estonians hope that our first-time candidature for a non-permanent member seat for the period 2020-2021 will be successful. We regained independence 26 years ago, but we already have 22 years of participation in United Nations peacekeeping under our belt. As a small country, we care for all those who are vulnerable in the world. As a digital society, we are a story of hope and of rapid transformation from a poor country recovering from occupation to one that is able to provide for its own citizens and contribute to multilateral cooperation. Again, as a digital State, we consider transparency and being close to people as obligations of a State. We are adamant supporters of rules-based decision-making and clarity of process. We are with those who want to make the United Nations more nimble in order to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Estonia for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Jimmy Morales, President of the Republic of Guatemala

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guatemala.

Mr. Jimmy Morales, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Jimmy Morales, President of the Republic of Guatemala, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Morales (*spoke in Spanish*): May my first words be of solidarity with the people and the Government of Mexico, given the tragedy that has beset that beautiful country today. Guatemala has made available a search-and-rescue team. Similarly, we wish to express our most sincere solidarity with all the Caribbean islands that have been affected by storms and hurricanes.

I am grateful to Mr. Peter Thomson for his excellent stewardship as President of the General Assembly during the previoius session, and I wish Mr. Miroslav Lajčák every success as President of the Assembly at its current session. I should also like to take this opportunity to welcome most warmly Secretary-General António Guterres, whom I have already congratulated.

As a sign of of our commitment to peace and development, on 6 July we signed our commitment to the national development agenda, which incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals in our national development plan — K'atún: Our Guatemala 2032 — in order to achieve the goals, targets and indicators set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and thus to affect the well-being of Guatemalans. Similarly, my country has as its priority guaranteeing food security, attaining respect for and promoting human rights, ending poverty, improving the lot of the most vulnerable, stewarding our natural resources and making gender equality a reality.

Guatemala is committed to submitting to its third Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council next November and to a review of its compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In a historic event for indigenous peoples, we have drawn up, through consensus and inclusive dialogue, an operational guide for the holding of consultations with indigenous peoples, pursuant to Convention No.169 of the International Labour Organization. The guide will help public institutions to comply with their obligations in consultation with indigenous peoples on the type of development they want to achieve.

Again on human rights, I wish to recall that Guatemala, after 36 years of internal armed conflict, signed a peace agreement and took on the even more arduous task of peacebuilding. That conflict was conditioned by international ideological polarization engendered by political doctrines that are alien to us.

Its aftermath weakened State institutions, preventing them from providing necessary services to our people.

We recognized our weakness in proceeding alone and therefore turned to the United Nations. At our initiative, we entered into an agreement with the Organization to establish the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). That experience is unique in the world and has an important mandate that necessitates faithful compliance, not only only as it pertains to us but as a function of the rule of law.

The Commission started its work in 2007. At first, it was to last for two years, a period that has been extended five times, most recently on 4 September. This extension, which I signed in advance, shows our firmest commitment to strengthening and supporting the Commission so that it achieves its goal of transferring its capacities to the State institutions, without setback or challenge. My Administration has significantly increased the budget allocations for the justice sector. The increase is unprecedented in the history of the country so that it may have a strong judicial system.

CICIG has performed much good work, and that is precisely why we support it. The limits of its mandate are the political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, the laws of our country and the agreement itself — the establishment and elaboration of CICIG. We — Guatemala and the United Nations Secretariat — are the guarantors of its observance.

It is a principle of our country that nobody should interfere in the administration of justice. Whatever form interference might take — direct or indirect, through the media or any act that, though it might not appear connected, could affect sovereignty — it could affect the working of the country.

Our Government is fully committed to the fight against corruption and impunity. We have therefore begun the process of reviewing the interpretation and the correct implementation of the CICIG agreement, whereby we hope, in an objective and balanced fashion, to perfect, fine tune and correctly implement the task of the Commission, while guaranteeing due process, the presumption of innocence, and avoiding, at all costs, selective persecution, the politicization of justice and a litigation culture in politics. We trust that we will soon begin the relevant actions for both interested parties.

The environment is one of the many issues that we wish to address. On 25 January, Guatemala signed and ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. That is a clear demonstration of my country's level of commitment to meeting its international and national obligations in that regard. I take this opportunity to thank President Emmanuel Macron for his initiative in the global pact for the environment, which we support. Aware of its own high degree of vulnerability and threats of nature, Guatemala already has a national action plan on climate change, so that our domestic legislation may be carried out to achieve mitigation, adaptation and resilience to climate change.

With regard to nutrition and food security, with the support of the World Food Programme we have put together the final report of the strategic review of the situation in Guatemala in that regard, with an emphasis on chronic malnutrition and its root causes. With that tool, we are working hard on our national strategy for the prevention of chronic malnutrition for the period 2016-2020, which is related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Faced with the threat of transnational organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism, my Government has made the strengthening of justice and security institutions a priority. With that goal in mind, we have been working hand in hand with our international partners to end crime, corruption and drug trafficking once and for all. In June, the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America was held in Miami, in which Guatemala was recognized for its strong commitment to the Alliance for Prosperity, its continued support in the fight against drug trafficking and its determined work to advance the shared goals of promoting security in the region.

A major issue for my country, with which we have always dealt seriously, is the interinstitutional and international efforts in the migration phenomenon, with special emphasis on the alliances with El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and the United States of America. Alongside those actors, we have focused on efforts to boost the economy and improve security conditions in order to reduce migration and decrerase the risk migrants face when embarking on a dangerous journey in search of a better quality of life. That is why we value the efforts of all States Members of the Organization in the process of negotiating the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, which is planned as an updated mechanism within the United Nations

that prioritizes the capacity, work and contribution of migrants, regardless of their immigration status.

Consistent with the need to care for our nationals, we have expanded our consular assistance in the United States in order to promote and protect the human rights of migrants in this country and provide consular assistance closer to them.

I would also like to mention that, in April, Panama and Guatemala signed an information exchange and migration alert agreement, which facilitates the mobility of people from both countries and establishes cooperation links in migration matters. In that context, I want to refer to our so-called young dreamers, who help make up a group of people who bring talent, knowledge and work to the development of the communities where they currently live. Like other countries that count on dreamers protected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, Guatemala hopes that human sentiment and the regional solidarity of the Government of the United States will prevail so that in the coming months Congress will adopt legislation that allows that group of young people and children to attain permanent legal status and enable them to stay and study in the United States.

My country's role in the multilateral sphere aims to contribute to strengthening the conditions for sustainable peace on the ground. It is precisely in that sphere, where peacekeeping is one of the most noble tasks of the Organization, in which Guatemala is proud to participate. Our commitment is reflected in the deployment of our contingents to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other missions on the African continent where we actively participate, as well as in Haiti, where Guatemalan personnel directly support national efforts with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, whose mandate is about to end. We are also honoured to continue participating in the United Nations Mission in Colombia. We will continue to contribute constructively to those international efforts with the highest level of professionalism and dedication.

Guatemala, in line with the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative on nuclear weapons, strongly condemns acts of provocation and destabilization that undermine international peace and security and increase tensions not only at the regional level, but also worldwide. Those acts impede peaceful dialogue with a view to contributing to denuclearization. We have repeatedly condemned the nuclear tests carried out by North Korea, as they are a flagrant violation of international law and various resolutions of the Security Council, as well as of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Collective security can be achieved only through the prohibition and total elimination of nuclear weapons. For that reason, tomorrow Guatemala will sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, thereby taking an important step to reach a world free of nuclear weapons.

My country is concerned about the serious situation facing the Venezuelan people. The political crisis afflicting that beautiful fraternal country is drifting towards the possibility of a rupture of the democratic order, a lack of constitutional guarantees, the violation of human rights and continuous acts of violence, persecution and political repression. We share the serious concern of other countries of the region. That is why we seek to explore ways to contribute to the restoration of democracy in that country through a peaceful and negotiated exit.

Before the Assembly, I want to reaffirm the commitment of my country to resolving permanently and definitively, in the International Court of Justice, our territorial, insular and maritime dispute with Belize, a country with which we aspire to have a privileged relationship and a permanent dialogue about the solution of our common problems.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to send a message of unity to my country. We are experiencing a moment of polarization that is not favourable to that and will not lead us to any safe place. I have welcomed the call for dialogue by some parties, and today, as a democratically elected representative of national unity, I call on all sectors to engage in a serious dialogue on themes that are truly structural, in which we seek solutions to the problems, with all of us participating and helping as a nation. That participation will allow us to speak of deep reforms to the State, which we must solve in the areas of security and justice, and of economic and social development, both rural and urban, as well as the issue of political participation and the functioning of the State. I will return to my country, as always, with hopes of a better future.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guatemala for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jimmy Morales, President of the Republic of Guatemala, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Ahmadzai: As I stand here before the General Assembly today, I am reminded that the wise men and women of 1945 displayed a unique capacity to learn from and act on the lessons of history. Shaped by the Great Depression and tempered by the carnage of the Second World War, they established global order through institutions that would provide security and stability for generations to come. The United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other organizations were founded to coordinate responses to international challenges and to make crimes against humanity a thing of the past.

There can be little doubt that today the scale, scope and speed of their imagination and efforts have not yet been matched. But future historians will judge those institutions on how they respond to the challenges of today and the challenges we must confront in the future. As global leaders, we seek certainty and familiarity in the rules of the game that dominated the twentieth century. But in today's ever-changing world, the dominant contextual characteristic defining our times is extreme uncertainty. It is easy to illustrate this uncertainty by looking at threats we are facing — to our economies, our security and our values. There is an emerging consensus that advanced economies have yet to arrive at proper growth models to overcome high unemployment, decreasing income and wealth inequality. The threat of economic crisis, therefore, still hangs over us.

Sixteen years after the tragedy of 11 September 2001, the threat of violence by non-State actors has taken the form of a fifth wave of political violence and terrorism. Driven by transnational terrorist networks, criminal organizations, cybercrime and State sponsorship of terror, this fifth wave promises to be a decades-long threat to international security rather than a passing phenomenon. In the twentieth century, the world came together to push back the spread of fascism so that democratic freedoms could be secured. Those very freedoms are under attack today from global terrorism. Terrorism is not only an attack on human life and basic freedoms, but an attack on the compact of citizenship, an attack on the nation-State's relationship with its people, which makes democratic societies unique, fair and free. We must confront the threat of terrorism as a united force and meet it with a long-term solution that matches the long-term agenda of the terrorists themselves.

Lastly, despite the incorporation of tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into the Constitutions of most countries of the world, crimes against humanity still occur with painful regularity. The ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya is especially shocking. Aung San Suu Kyi's lengthy silence was tragic, as our hopes that an icon of human rights would choose principle over power were frustrated. I welcome the chance for Afghanistan to have a seat on the Human Rights Council in order to have a more central role in discussions on these important issues. As a people who are still experiencing crimes against humanity — the latest being killing of civilians in the Mirza Ulang village and attacks on mosques in Kabul and Herat and elsewhere — we are eager to add our voice in support of human rights.

Overcoming the destructive and disruptive patterns of change in the twenty-first century requires collective and coordinated action at the global, local and individual levels. An effective, efficient and respected United Nations is the need of the hour; we must let our twentieth-century institutions be put to the test. I therefore congratulate His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on assuming the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I also want to recognize and appreciate the efforts of His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson during the previous session, and I commend His Excellency Secretary-General Guterres for launching his reform of the United Nations.

If the United Nations did not exist today, we would have to invent it to address the demands of our time. Delivering on the promises of the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the context of uncertainty requires re-examination of core functions, re-engineering of business processes, reinvigoration of organizational culture and values, and the reform of systems of accountability. If the United Nations is to be more relevant to countries like mine, it must deliver as one United Nations. But this objective has not yet been fulfilled. The inherited model of the United Nations agencies as instruments of technical assistance and capacity-building should be subjected to the market test, namely, value-for-money and sustainability of results in comparison to Government, private sector and non-governmental modes of delivery. Mutual accountability is a proven mechanism of consolidation and expansion of partnerships and trust-building.

I am honoured to stand before the General Assembly to represent and speak for the people of Afghanistan. We have borne adversity, deprivation and drought with dignity, met invasion with valour and defended our homeland with patriotic fervour. As the front-line State in the global struggle against terrorism and in the front-line of defence of democratic freedoms, our people and security forces are accomplishing heroic deeds on a daily basis. We too — as a nation, a State and a people — are reinventing ourselves to address the challenges and potential offered to us in the twenty-first century.

With President Trump's recent announcement of his strategy to counter terror and stabilize South Asia, Afghanistan's enduring partnership with the United States and the international community has been renewed and redirected. We welcome that strategy, which has now set us on a pathway to certainty. The Afghan people have looked to the United States for this type of resolve for years. We pay tribute to all the men and women of allied nations who have served with us, particularly those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The strategy consolidates all instruments of American power, conveying a message that the Taliban and their backers cannot win militarily. Only through political settlement can we achieve enduring peace, and I call upon all ranks of Taliban to engage in intra-Afghan dialogue.

We now also have an opportunity for a dialogue with our neighbours on how we can work together earnestly to eliminate terrorism and contain extremism. I call upon Pakistan to engage with us in a comprehensive State-to-State dialogue on peace, security and regional cooperation leading to prosperity.

The Afghan Government has proven that we are committed to peace through our own internal processes, as demonstrated by the peace agreement with Hizb-international Islami. We now call on all of our neighbours, near and far, to join us through the Kabul process in our comprehensive quest for peace and regional stability. However, moving forward, we ask for a change of perspective from our international partners. For too long, the conflict in Afghanistan has been viewed through the prism of civil war; but the war is not within our soil, it is over our soil.

Today there are over 20 international terrorist groups with an imposed presence on Afghan soil. The future of Afghanistan matters because we are on the front lines of the global effort to eradicate the threat of terrorism. Our brave soldiers are fighting and dying for the cause and the sovereignty of the Afghan nation every day. Although we may be on the front lines, the threat knows no boundaries.

For terrorist groups that are harboured in the region, attacks in Kabul, Brussels, Paris, Barcelona, London or anywhere else are equal victories. President Trump" new strategy includes the disruption and denial of sanctuary to terrorists, whose motives know no boundaries. However, a strong and enduring commitment from our international partners alone will not ensure our collective success in Afghanistan. The roots of success are indeed within us, as Afghans.

Today, nearly three years into our decade of transformation, we are turning Afghanistan into a platform for stability. The foundation has been laid. We have articulated and are rigorously implementing road maps for reform: we are prosecuting the corrupt, ending corruption in the security sector, replacing systems of patronage with merit-based systems and making financial processes transparent.

We are also reaching out to those who had previously been excluded from society — young people, the poor and women. Yet those people are our nation's source of resilience. The generation that grew up in the 1990s, which makes up the majority of our population, is now being entrusted with wholesale leadership of the country. A generational change is taking place as youth are empowered at every level. This generation will be

the one that reforms the Government into one that is citizen- and service-oriented.

Through unimaginable hardship, women kept the fabric of our communities and societies together, even as they fell to shreds. Yet women were relegated to the very bottom of society. That was unacceptable, and our nation suffered for it. Today there are more Afghan women in Government, the workforce and active in civil society than ever before in Afghan history, yet we still have far to go. At the helm, we have six women Ambassadors and four women Cabinet members. Simply put, women's empowerment is crucial to our future.

The poor, along with women and young people, are the numerical majorities in Afghanistan that cross ethnic, linguistic, gender and religious lines. About 40 per cent of Afghans still live below the poverty line. Research shows that poverty perpetuates itself because it affects the physiological make-up of a child's brain. We must empower the poor. For too long, they have been the silent majority in our country.

We are recreating the bonds of society in order to change the culture of our State. And we are strengthening our bonds not only internally, but regionally. As we look to our neighbours in South and Central Asia, we are simultaneously strengthening national, global and regional connectivity. Afghanistan will again become a multifaceted hub in the twenty-first century for transport, energy, water and mining and for the benefit of the entire region's economic prosperity and security.

We are already seeing the fruits of our labour. Transmission lines for Central and South Asia, power projects are under construction; the Turkmen railway has reached our border; and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline for natural gas is under construction. As a central part of our plan for economic advancement, we continue to work with our regional partners to seek avenues of collaboration. We can see now, amid the uncertainties and unique challenges and threats of the twenty-first century, how Afghanistan has become a conundrum for the twentieth-century approaches within which the global order tends to still operate.

While the threat of international terrorism playing out on our soil has dominated the narrative of our country and driven the fate of our people for far too long, we also have enormous potential to be the regional brokers of peace, a hub for economic prosperity and a beacon of democratic values. The birthplace of Rumi still resounds with messages of love, peace and hope. Afghanistan will yet again be the Asian crossroads for dialogue among civilizations and a model of harmony and culture of tolerance and engagement. I am confident that our plans and programmes for self-reliance and reform, bolstered by the commitment of our international partners, will chart out a path for us towards realizing our full potential.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of The Gambia.

Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of the Gambia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Barrow: With warm greetings to all members of the General Assembly from the new Gambia, we thank the Almighty God for making this great gathering of global leaders possible once again this year. Allow me to formally congratulate the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General of the Organization on their leadership and commitment to the values of the United Nations.

After more than 70 years of existence, the United Nations undoubtedly remains the ultimate international platform for finding solutions to global challenges, as we in the Gambia know all too well. Today, on my maiden appearance at this great forum of world leaders, let me take this opportunity to reaffirm The Gambia's firm commitment to the Charter of the United Nations. My Government fully appreciates the United Nations central role in the pursuit of preventive diplomacy to avert crises around the world.

The recent political crisis that took place in my country created a new democratic beginning, and the experience taught us useful lessons that Gambians will not easily forget. We learned that willpower, national unity, decisive regional intervention and the undivided and clear support of the international community could produce positive outcomes. Also of importance was the coordinated international action inspired by our common values of solidarity, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, which were critical in sending the right message to the former President to respect the will of the people and leave without bloodshed.

During those difficult times, we knew we had friends — ones who came to our aid and who have since kept faith with us. We therefore would like to seize this great opportunity to thank the leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for their timely and firm intervention in bringing peace to The Gambia. We also thank all our regional and international friends who stood by us in our critical hour of need. Thanks to their collective efforts, The Gambia is now on a solid path to peace and good governance, and ready to resume playing our traditional role among the champions of human rights and democracy. Gambians have made an irreversible choice to close a dark chapter in our history, and today our national agenda is one of reform and transformation.

Like any other restored democracy, we are facing enormous challenges in the revival of our economy and a comprehensive reform of our laws and our administrative and judicial institutions. The modernization of our security sector and the consolidation of the rule of law and human rights are part of our reform programme. It is only by overcoming these challenges that we can reinforce our democratic gains, and my Government is committed to delivering a new Gambia that is fit for our children to be proud of. Indeed, young people were all along at the forefront of our democratic transition, and addressing youth unemployment is a top priority for my Government and will no doubt create enormous opportunities.

We also recognize the crucial role of Gambians in the diaspora in contributing to the transformation of our motherland. Let me seize this opportunity to sincerely thank our development partners and friends for the invaluable budget and policy support they are providing to the Government to help address the challenges of job creation and youth irregular migration. My Government is committed to using such resources wisely for sustainable socioeconomic development.

We may be a small country but we have huge needs. As a matter of urgent priority, we have developed a national development plan in line with the transformative agenda of the new Gambia. This development blueprint is designed to put the country back on track to economic growth and prosperity following two decades of mismanagement, corruption and widespread human rights violations. This new plan is built on sound macroeconomic and fiscal policies that will lead to economic stability and growth over the medium and long terms. It has also incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals and other commitments contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The Paris Agreement is critically relevant to The Gambia because climate change means a lot more in our situation. When land productivity declines and water shortage intensifies, young people from rural areas are often sent away to ease the burden on their families and to find new sources of income. This sadly explains why many young Gambians have been forced to make the long and dangerous journey to Europe. The journey is so risky that many perish on the high seas and never reach their final destination. Countless others disappear into immigration detention centres or vanish in the sands of the Sahara desert. Those who are able to complete the journey are often dismissed as economic migrants and sent back home. This sense of hopelessness and frustration also provides fertile ground for smugglers and extremist groups to recruit innocent young people into the criminal underworld.

Young people do not deserve this experience; they deserve the chance to enjoy a safe and prosperous future at home. Creating new employment opportunities that provide young people with sustainable incomes and connect them to a revitalized land and a healthy and productive environment is an investment in the future of the nation. This is a key priority of our national development plan.

Over the past decade, we have lost many of our friends and development partners through the wrong policy choices, but since the restoration of democracy and good governance many of our long-standing partners are coming back to work with us. We are in the process of rejoining the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court. We are also committed to

being part of the African Peer Review Mechanism. We are finalizing plans for a roundtable donors' conference to mobilize resources for the long-term development of the country. The continued support, solidarity and partnership of the international community will be critical to the success of that conference.

Although The Gambia did not go through armed conflict, the political crisis that we experienced arose as a result of decades of bad governance, weak State institutions, the rule of fear and growing intolerance. We were on the brink of physical violence and armed conflict. We therefore express our deep appreciation to the United Nations Office for West Africa, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office for the critical initial support they have rendered to my country.

The pursuit of peace and security in Africa and the world will always be a major foreign policy goal for The Gambia. We will pursue good-neighbourliness and cooperation with our sister Republic of Senegal, and the countries of ECOWAS will remain our strategic partners.

West Africa is on the march towards the consolidation of its democratic gains, but as a region we are facing serious threats to our peace and security. Terrorism, extremism, religious intolerance, organized crime and drug trafficking are seriously undermining our development efforts. Recent attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and the Sahel in general underscore the urgent need for greater regional and international cooperation in addressing those challenges. The indifference, injustices and indignities in isolated parts of the world create real threats to global peace, prosperity and democracy. We need to take bigger and bolder steps to close the gap between the North and South, as the world is too imbalanced.

We remain deeply concerned that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still defies resolution. My Government firmly subscribes to the idea of a two-State solution for the two peoples to live side by side in peace and harmony. We therefore call on the Secretary-General to vigorously pursue that formula in the interest of lasting peace.

Continued support in the areas of transitional justice and security sector reform will certainly go a long way towards entrenching peace, justice and democracy in The Gambia.

There is a shortage neither of ideas nor of resources to fix the major problems facing the human race. What has always been scarce is political will, and unless adequate resources are invested the pace of development will remain slow and a minimal impact will be achieved. It is against that backdrop that I am calling on the private sector to emulate philanthropists in their generosity towards the most isolated, marginalized and deprived sections of the world. Providing safe drinking water, roads, power, health care and education is key to restoring human dignity.

In our foreign policy, as part of our historic friendship we fully recognize the One China policy. The People's Republic of China is the sole representative of the Chinese people and a true friend of The Gambia. Our two countries continue to strengthen cooperation on the basis of a win-win approach, built on mutual trust and respect within the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

An organization like the United Nations, by virtue of its functions, will always require some level of reform of its management systems. The intergovernmental character of the mandates entrusted to the Secretariat requires the existence of trust and accountability between Member States and the Secretariat. As the United Nations embarks on its proposed reforms, we stand ready to give it full support in the interest of an effective and more relevant world body.

Last but not least, one long-standing issue is the pending question of Security Council reform. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said that no reform of the United Nations can be complete without reform of the Security Council. That remains true today. Africa will not give up its legitimate and historic quest for true representation on the Council, and The Gambia fully supports the African Union's demand for the long-overdue reform of the Security Council.

I want to conclude by reaffirming my optimism and confidence in our collective ability to uplift humankind from the clutches of poverty; to institute a global order of peace, firmly held together by justice; and to love, care and tolerate each other. In tune with our national anthem, we pledge our firm allegiance to those values that we hold ever true. I offer the best wishes from the people of The Gambia — the smiling coast of Africa.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of The Gambia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people of Bolivia, I wish to express our full solidarity with the people of Mexico. Alarmed by this afternoon's earthquake, we extend our support and brotherhood to Mexico as it addresses the resulting problems.

Once again, as leaders of the world we have gathered here in the historic Hall of the General Assembly. We meet yet again to voice our positions on the major challenges facing our family — the human family. The United Nations, as set forth in its Charter, was established to save succeeding generations from war, promote social progress and improve the standard of living of all peoples. Unfortunately, many of those promises have come to nothing, and after more than 70 years we see that in many instances, instead of making progress towards those objectives, we have regressed.

As we have affirmed many times, due to the abusive practices of imperialism, the market of savage consumption that supports capitalism and endless colonialist adventures, the world is enduring a multiplicity of crises that, instead of being resolved, are growing worse. War and violent conflict remain the scourge of millions of people. External aggressions in Iraq have led to more than a million deaths to date. In Syria, almost half a million people have lost their lives. In Libya, tens of thousands have been killed. In Yemen, the humanitarian crisis is of great proportions.

History has shown that, in order to appropriate natural resources and control the world geopolitically, military bases are deployed, invasions are organized, and Governments are brought down to create chaos and take advantage of the situation. Many of these invasions have fuelled the emergence of terrorist groups and unleashed violent confrontations and attacks on civilian populations, causing even more harm to innocent victims. Bolivia condemns terrorism and calls for fighting it and for resolving the structural causes of its emergence.

To this terrible situation is added the climatic crisis. We note that this year has again been the hottest in the history of the planet. Hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, droughts, pollution of the air and oceans and the consequent extinction of species are results of the capitalist model, consumption levels and excessive industrialization. In this situation, the countries of the South, which pollute the least, are the ones that suffer the most. It is imperative that all our countries join the Paris Agreement on Climate Change to work together to address the enormous challenges involved in saving the planet.

It is unjustifiable and inadmissible that the United States has decided to turn its back on the Paris Agreement. As one of the world's main polluters, its Government, by refusing to do its part in the global effort, has become a threat to Mother Earth. What is necessary is unequivocal political will. We cannot expect market forces to finally convince the leaders of the capitalist world to take action. We extend our embrace of solidarity to our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean who are suffering the consequences of the passage of hurricanes. Together, as a united family, we will share with them what we have, even if it is not enough.

Our rivers, our seas, our forests and science have given us irrefutable evidence and call upon us to act. Water is the blood of Mother Earth that gives life to rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, which in turn are a source of life and generate balance. They are universal commons that cover three-quarters of our home. They bathe everything on all continents and islands of the Earth. They do this naturally, with no regard for political borders or nationalities. They should be respected, cared for, shared and preserved for future generations.

Bolivia has promoted the recognition that water is a human right. It is essential for the survival of humankind. Accordingly, our Constitution also prohibits it from being the used for profit or commercialism. The use of

water must lead the way to opportunities that promote collaboration, interaction and harmony among peoples, not to cause conflicts over its origin, ownership or use. It is in this spirit of safeguarding human rights and sovereign rights related to our natural resources and in pursuit of good-neighbourly agreements that Bolivia hopes to resolve its Silala water dispute, which has been brought to the International Court of Justice. Water should not be the cause of internal or international conflicts. It must bring together and unite all States, nations, communities, peoples, social movements and individuals. For Bolivia, which is the hydrographic heart of South America, this concept is very important. Where water flows, peace must flow.

Not only is the world growing warmer every year, but each succeeding year is growing more unfair and more unequal. The gap between those who have the most — everything — and those who have almost nothing is widening every day. According to the most recent report from Oxfam, eight people have the same amount of wealth as 3.6 billion people, that is, half of the population of the planet.

Inequality is immoral. If 800 million people suffer from hunger, it is not because there is a lack of food. If millions of children die from infection, it is not because there is a lack of medicine. If 1.1 billion people do not have electricity, it is not because of a lack of energy in the world. If there is illiteracy, it is not because there are no books. If there are poor people in the world, it is not because there are no resources.

Due to war, terrorism and other conflicts, we are experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis since the founding of the United Nations. More than 128 million people in 33 countries require humanitarian assistance. More than 65 million people have been forcibly displaced. More than 22 million are refugees, which is the highest number ever recorded in the human history. More than 10 million people are stateless.

This calls for our attention. Bolivia condemns the construction of walls and laws that seek to criminalize migration. Accordingly, we propose the creation of a universal citizenship. The social and immigration crisis has its origin in the dominant world order, with its limitless greed for profit and appropriation of the commons, produces violence, promotes inequalities and destroys Mother Earth. Migrants cannot be held responsible for the economic and financial crises or for insecurity. We must not allow them to be viewed as criminals either. No migrant is illegal.

Some Governments, far from helping to resolve the structural causes of this phenomenon, such as war, the consequences of climate change or the economic asymmetries among the States, proclaim greater restrictions in their migration policies, massive expulsions and the building of walls. Walls counter the history of humankind. Walls cripple science and knowledge. Walls confine our souls, fuel hatred of difference and stifle freedom.

In Tiquipaya, Bolivia, representatives of social movements from 45 countries around the world came together at the World Peoples' Conference in June for a world without walls towards universal citizenship. At that conference, we drafted alternative proposals with a humanist vision to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants. In August, Pope Francis dedicated a pastoral document to those four verbs.

We too call on the Governments of the world to come together to tackle criminal networks that traffic in human beings by declaring the trade and traffick in human beings as a crime against humanity and by considering the formation of a world ombudsman as an authority of universal jurisdiction responsible for ensuring human rights. Once again, I call for a global pact to act as the bridge to move towards the universal citizenship that we desire, because there are no categories and there are no differences between nationals and foreigners. We are all human beings and children of Mother Earth.

The United States of America must unilaterally and unconditionally put an end to the unjust embargo that has caused so much suffering to the Cuban people for nearly 60 years. It is an unjust and failed policy, and must be abandoned. The recent actions announced by President Trump spell a resurgence in the financial and trade embargo against Cuba and reverse the progress made between the two nations. The United States must not only lift that criminal embargo, but also make economic reparations for the damage caused and return Guantánamo to Cuban sovereignty. I pay deepest tribute to the memories of Commander Fidel and Commander Che Guevara, who from this very rostrum warned us not to trust imperialism.

We welcome the peace process in Colombia, including the consolidation of the ceasefire, disarmament and the integration of the Fuerzas

Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia into political life. Revolutions take place through the ballot box and social consensus, not through bullets. Latin America and the Caribbean are coming together as a region of peace.

Bolivia unequivocally condemns the unilateral sanctions and the threats of invasion levelled by the Government of the United States against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Our region is nobody's back yard. We also reject the conduct of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, who is the spokesperson for anti-Latin American interests. We express our support for and solidarity with President Nicolás Maduro and the Venezuelan people. We welcome and support the ongoing democratic dialogue.

For Bolivia, the Palestinian cause is indisputable. We condemn the criminal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. We condemn the construction of new settlements, and we condemn military aggression against the Palestinian people. We demand the achievement of a two-State solution and the establishment of a Palestinian State withing the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We condemn the unilateral and illegal military actions of the United States in deploying its forces in the Syrian Arab Republic. We welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General, Russia, Iran, Turkey and Kazakhstan in seeking a ceasefire and in contributing to the peace negotiations process. We believe that if it were not for interventionism, we would not be suffering that war.

Bolivia condemns the production, development and use of all nuclear and chemical weapons, which pose a serious threat to peace, security and human life itself. We demand that all military interventions be avoided in resolving the situation in the Korean peninsula, and that negotiations be resumed as soon as possible to resolve that conflict peacefully. It is clear that the main threat to mother Earth, multilateralism, peace and freedom is the Government of the United States of America.

It is my duty to describe the economic and social situation of my country. Bolivia has consolidated an economic model that has successfully coped with the global crisis of the capitalist system. Bolivia leads economic growth in our region. We have recovered our homeland. Bolivia is a land that is free of illiteracy, free of North American military bases, free of the Drug Enforcement Administration and free of the United States Agency for International Development. It is a land free of impositions by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Over the past decade, we have reduced extreme poverty from 38.2 per cent to 16.8 per cent, and we will eradicate it by 2025. We have reduced inequality. In 2005, the wealthiest 10 per cent held 128 times more wealth than the poorest 10 per cent; now, the wealthiest 10 per cent hold 46 times more wealth than the poorest 10 per cent. Bolivia ranks second in the world among the countries with the most women in Parliament. We are committed to multilateralism, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the peaceful and negotiated resolution of conflicts.

In 2003, Bolivia came before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, seeking a peaceful solution to its unresolved 100-year-old dispute with the Republic of Chile that would allow us to exercise our right to sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean. We seek a solution that will satisfy both the historical and legislative background and the future understanding between neighbourly and fraternal peoples through an opportune and effective negotiation in good faith.

We trust in the Court's decision and in a process of dialogue and negotiation that, unlike the invasions that we have suffered in the past, will help us to overcome our differences and promote our complementarity, free and sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean and the proper use of our shared natural resources. We are grateful for the solidarity shown by many States, peoples and leaders who have expressed their support for our maritime cause. I take this opportunity to ask all participants in the Assembly to accompany us in our peaceful quest for justice. It is anunwavering challenge for the brotherhood of our people over the coming generations.

With every passing year, our challenges become greater. War continues to destroy cities and global warming is a growing threat. If we truly want to resolve those issues and defend the interests of our peoples, it is essential to recognize basic services as human rights, respect the rights of Mother Earth and take up the fight against capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. Only if we win that fight will there be an authentic global order, based on solidarity, equality and social justice and respect for the right of peoples to peace and development so that they can live comfortably.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, President of the Republic of Honduras

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mr. Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, President of the Republic of Honduras, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Hernández Alvarado (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people of Honduras, I would like to extend greetings to the General Assembly.

The Honduran people extend solidarity to their Mexican brothers and sisters in the wake of the recent tragedy. I reiterate our commitment to continuing to provide supplies and support.

Three years ago, I addressed the General Assembly for the first time (see A/69/PV.7). Three years later, I would like to reflect on how Honduras has met the challenges it has encountered. Today, I would like to share with the Assembly and with the world how we are building a new Honduras.

Four years ago, transnational organized crime in Honduras led to high levels of violence seen in very few countries around the world. At the end of 2013, there were 75 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, and two years prior to 2013, the figure stood at almost 90 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. From 2013 to date, however, the murder rate of 75 per 100,000 inhabitants has fallen by almost 30 percentage points.

The most recent *Global Peace Index* issued by the Institute for Economics and Peace indicates that our management of the situation has placed Honduras 17 places higher in the global peace ranking. We have also managed to lower our fiscal deficit to 3 per cent from 8 per cent of gross domestic product. We have improved the Honduran economy and growth this year stands at 4.1 per cent. Our exports have increased, investments are on the rise and our national reserves are enough to purchase almost six months worth of imports. The country's national currency has been revalued and inflation is very moderate. Risk-rating agencies have raised Honduras' credit rating. Our rating is now the best we have ever had.

This year, we, along with neighbour Guatemala, started the first customs union of the Americas. Honduras and Guatemala now have a zone with free movement of goods, services and people. In addition, we are negotiating with our brothers of El Salvador and Nicaragua to join the customs union and, in the future, we hope that Costa Rica and Panama will also become members. In that way, we will become the seventh largest market in Latin America.

El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras have also launched a plan to develop the Gulf of Fonseca, which has the support of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration. That will enable us to create a genuine hub for economic, tourism and social development in the Pacific region. It will be the region's first special economic zone. This region, formerly rife with conflict among the three nations, will become a development hub for the good of our three countries.

I would also like to share with the Assembly the fact that Honduras is poised to make extraordinary headway in attracting investment. I am referring to the establishment of employment and economic development zones, in which both national and international investment will have institutional guarantees in four key areas — the legal, economic, administrative and political spheres — based on good practices that are familiar to companies and workers in prosperous countries. My country and people's very productive labour force will then have the best opportunities in the world, under the Honduran flag. Based on the economic development plan, Honduras 2020, we will be creating at least 600,000 new jobs for Hondurans over the next five years.

Over the past four years, we have invested approximately $2 billion in infrastructure to make Honduras a major logistics hub in Central America. We have built airports, ports in the Atlantic and the

Pacific, highways, an interoceanic highway and a next-generation customs model. All of this will allow the Central American region to have an outstanding logistics system.

We are also making strides in the areas of transparency and counter-corruption. We are the only country in the world that has signed an agreement with Transparency International to work with that organization in five civil service sectors. We have made considerable progress in applying international standards when acquiring and setting up infrastructure, through the Construction Sector Transparency initiative.

We are cleaning up our national police. We are creating a new police institution. We are strengthening our public ministry. We are created anti-corruption courts. We entered into an agreement with the Organization of American States to establish what we call the Mission of Support against Corruption and Impunity. In addition we have reorganized system through which the national health system purchases medicines.

In line with our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 1, our Administration has implemented the most ambitious social programme to protect our most vulnerable citizens. We have named this programme Better Life. It helps us to bring dignity to our compatriots suffering from extreme poverty. There are already nearly 2.5 million participants involved in at least one of the components of Better Life.

I would also like to state that Honduras fully supports the reform of the United Nations system promoted by the Secretary-General in order to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our countries face major challenges due to climate change, the emergence of the nuclear threat, poverty, organized international crime, terrorism, racism, intolerance and human rights violations. These are challenges that we must analyse and face together with determination and absolute commitment. Climate change has been relentless, bringing a tragic series of hurricanes and tropical storms. I wish to express our solidarity and condolences to our brothers affected by the destructive force of these recent natural phenomena, and we encourage the Assembly to assist the countries, predominantly in the Caribbean, that have suffered so much devastated. Honduras will be present, as we have already offered, for our brothers.

Nuclear weapons also pose a serious threat to humankind, and worse still is the threat of using them. Honduras rejects the recent nuclear-weapons tests. We support the resolutions adopted by the Security Council, as well as the channels conducive to the diplomatic management of tensions and threats to world peace.

Poverty is high on the agendas of Governments in developing countries. We have a duty to overcome the structural conditions that exclude large sectors of our societies from access to goods and services that would otherwise allow for a dignified life and opportunities for the comprehensive development of peoples, families, our communities and our countries.

Poverty has effects on the environment. It fosters internal and international migration and has serious social consequences stemming from the breakdown of the family breakdown and the separation it engenders, generating insecurity and violence. It causes much suffering. We must combat poverty with social safety nets, access to basic health and education services, inclusive and sound credit and technical assistance to avoid depriving people of the goods that are essential to life.

However, as developing countries we face the problem of the criterion that developed countries have adopted to allocate cooperation resources. What do I mean? Just think. The criterion used is that of classification by means of the national income of countries at three levels: high, medium and low. The premise is that most help will go to low-income countries, and that middle- and high-income countries have a greater internal capacity to overcome poverty. Because of that, the countries that are most harmed when it comes to access to international aid are those classified in the middle-income category, as is the case for Honduras.

Our country is committed to the defence and promotion of human rights. For Honduras, respect for the human person constitutes a State policy. We recently established a secretariat for human rights. We have institutionalized a mechanism for dialogue between the Government and human rights organizations, and we also manage the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, which is already open and functioning.

It is very painful for any person to be forced to leave their family, customs and the land of their birth. The migrants of our era are our new martyrs. They

are the new heroes who fight abroad, fight adversity, work tirelessly, carry out the most difficult work under the most difficult conditions and yet still press on. They are still able to contribute to their countries of destination with their talent, culture, dedication, efforts and by paying taxes. Our Honduran compatriots, who migrated when they faced difficult circumstances in our country, make us proud of their endeavours, and we therefore demand that they be treated in a way that is dignified and commensurate with their contribution to the countries to which they have gone to build a new life.

Honduras is endeavouring to improve the conditions of our citizens so that they do not have to leave, to abandon their homeland and families in search of opportunities in other countries. However, we are also working with our brother countries in Latin America to ensure that there is recognition of the contribution of those who, due to natural phenomena, have been granted temporary protection status, and for children who had to leave with their parents, grew up far from their homeland and began to dream in another.

May those dreams continue. May dreamers imagine a new world and be fuelled by hope, turning their yearnings into reality. We have worked for that new world the last four years. That new world is the reason we are here today. We are confident that our actions will allow us to see the rising of a new sun, of a new day. Nothing and no one can forbid us to dream. Let us continue to dream. Together, we can build a better world for our children and for the children of our children.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Honduras for the statement he hasjust made.

Mr. Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria.

Mr. Kurz (Austria): The world has never felt more insecure, at least not in my lifetime. Three years ago, when I first spoke from this rostrum (see A/69/PV.15), I was concerned about three serious challenges. First, violent conflict had returned to Europe with the crisis in and around Ukraine. Secondly, with the success of Da'esh in Iraq and Syria, radicalization and extremism sharply increased within our societies. Thirdly, the potential humanitarian consequences of a nuclear explosion became a growing concern.

Today we still face a violent conflict in and around Ukraine. Acts of extremism and terrorism continue, and the crisis in North Korea demonstrates that the risk of a nuclear confrontation is higher than the world has seen in a long time.

While we have achieved a lot over the past years, there are still too many conflicts around the world — conflicts that result in terrible human suffering, such as in Syria, South Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen or Libya. There are also new sources of instability, such as in Venezuela or in Myanmar. On a global level, poverty, hunger and climate change, as well as organized crime and the proliferation of weapons remain key concerns. What really worries me is that we seem to have lost trust in the ability of States and institutions to solve these challenges.

As current Chair-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I can see this on a regular basis. This is a dangerous development because there is no alternative to international cooperation. We need only took at terrorism. Terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh, work on a global scale. More than 25,000 persons die each year in terrorist attacks all over the world and almost all of them are the result of extreme radicalization. This is why, as OSCE Chair, the fight against radicalization is a priority for us. We are working on concrete recommendations for OSCE States on how to better prevent and stop radical groups from misleading our citizens.

What we need to do is to destroy these radical groups militarily where they operate, such as in Syria and Iraq, but we also have to be clear that after our military success, more foreign terrorist fighters will return to our societies. That is why, at the same time, we also have to continue the fight within our own societies. We have to take more action to stop radicals with police measures and prevent our youth from being misled by these terrorists.

The migration crisis is another global problem and source of instability. Over 60 million people are on the move worldwide. No country can manage this

crisis on its own. If we look at demographics, we know that we have to act now. In the next 30 years, the world population will grow from 7.5 to about 10 billion people. Africa's population alone will double from 1.2 to 2.5 billion people.

Recent years have shown how difficult such a massive migration movement can become. Over 1 million people have come to Europe via smugglers and thousands died in the Mediterranean Sea. We need to stop this. Uncontrolled migration leads to chaos. Therefore, we need to manage orderly migration and support people as much as possible in their countries of origin. In order to achieve this, we should address three key issues.

First, countries need to effectively control their borders. Without such control, no Government can establish security and maintain public support for legal immigration. Citizens need to have confidence that their Governments — not the smugglers — decide who should cross the border. Secondly, the business model of traffickers of human beings must be destroyed. Securing the borders is the most important first step. Smugglers cannot sell their tickets to Europe when there is no way to come through. People that are saved shall be brought back to their countries of origin or to internationally monitored migration centres in their region. Thirdly, we need effective support for countries of origin to establish a local perspective for the young generation there. This is why, over the past four years, Austria has doubled its bilateral development assistance and quadrupled its emergency fund. I am pleased that the United Nations is developing a global compact on migration, as well as a compact on refugees. They should ensure a more coordinated international approach to deal with these challenges.

Cooperation is also key when we address crises and conflicts around the globe. The crisis in and around Ukraine has lasted for far too long. More than 10,000 people have died and 3.8 million people are in need of humanitarian aid. Despite the Minsk agreements, heavy weapons continue to move into the region and mines are being laid; despite negotiations with the Normandy group, the political process is stalled; and despite regular meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group, there is no progress on the ground. The worst thing is that civilians suffer the most. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission is key to stabilizing the situation, but its unarmed monitors are increasingly threatened and, for the first time, the Mission lost one of its members.

Yet, despite this tragic incident, it is important to maintain the Mission. From my visit to the conflict zone, I know that without the OSCE Monitoring Mission, the situation would become even worse. Therefore, in March this year, the OSCE strengthened the Mission by increasing the number of monitors up to 1,000 and by providing better technical equipment. I also welcome the discussions in the Security Council to increase the security situation of the OSCE monitors, possibly with a United Nations peacekeeping operation. More safety for monitors means more monitors on the ground, and more monitors on the ground means more security for the local population. We are also working hard to find political solutions that extend beyond ceasefires. The goal remains clear — a free and stable Ukraine with good relations with both its western and eastern neighbours.

Allow me to turn to another security threat that we must deal with. The risk of nuclear confrontation today is bigger than it has been in a long time. The consequences of a nuclear explosion are extremely grave, nuclear disarmament remains the number-one unfinished business worldwide, and the recent escalation of tensions by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a clear warning signal.

Austria has been consistently engaged in efforts to reduce the risk of a nuclear disaster and to work for a world without nuclear weapons. This is a hard and long road, and we are not naive about that, but it is a goal that is worth fighting for. In that regard, we welcomed the Vienna agreement that placed Iran's nuclear activities under international monitoring. Undermining that agreement now would weaken efforts to achieve negotiated solutions for nuclear disputes.

The new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is an important achievement in this connection. It is a crucial, positive step to get rid of all nuclear weapons. Today we often hear that nuclear weapons are necessary for security. This narrative is not only wrong, it is also dangerous. The new Treaty provides a real alternative: a world without nuclear weapons, where everyone is safer. The overwhelming support of the international community in adopting the Treaty demonstrates that many countries share that goal. I hope that we will be successful with our initiative.

At a time when universal values are under threat, we need to be strong in standing up for human rights, the rule of law and good governance. Protecting civilians and human rights has always been a priority of Austria's foreign policy. That is why we hope to be elected to the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021, and I would like to ask the Assembly for its support. I can assure members that Austria will continue to work for effective international cooperation, and we will continue to actively support the United Nations and its new Secretary-General.

The Acting President: I now call on his Excellency Mr. Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Bih (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to read out the statement of His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ould Abdel Azia, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, on the occasion of the convening of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly.

> "First, I would like to express our sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák and to his friendly country, Slovakia, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I would also like to express my deep appreciation for Mr. Peter Thompson and his valuable efforts during his presidency of the seventy-first session. I would also like to greatly commend the tireless and noble efforts of His Excellency the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, in leading our Organization and in the service of international peace and security.
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> "The theme of our session, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", is a appropriate choice in a world witnessing great challenges. In that regard, Mauritania plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of international peace and security in the Sahel and the Sahara regions through a comprehensive approach based on openness, dialogue, professionalism and firmness. Our efforts have been crowned with success against terrorist groups after fierce battles in 2010 and 2011.
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> "In spite of an extremely complex regional situation, experts have noted that Mauritania has succeeded in dealing with terrorism and extremism. We have developed our security and defence capabilities in record time, with due attention to individual and collective rights and with extreme care for the least fortunate of society. That has been achieved by adopting a policy of sustainable development. Reporters Without Borders noted improvement over three successive years of continuous progress at the Arab and regional levels. We have also established a policy of dialogue, while ensuring the freedoms of expression, demonstration and organization, as well as human rights, after the so-called Arab Spring that swept over certain Arab countries.
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> "We have succeeded in establishing a political dialogue with the majority and the opposition since 2011 and introduced substantive legislative and organizational reforms, thereby empowering Mauritanian women and establishing the value of citizenship and goodwill for all. We have also promoted good governance and comprehensive dialogue with the opposition, civil society and independent persons, and since September and October 2016 we have succeeded in further establishing our democracy, the rule of law and the organization of public resources.
>
> "Our region faces grave dangers in terms of climate change, terrorism, organized crime, drugs, illegal weapons and illegal migration. Mauritania has improved its legal framework in accordance with international rights and standards, established 14 agreements and protocols relating to terrorism, and created an open dialogue with Salafists and religious extremists in order to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society.
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> "Our efforts have helped us achieve a high standing in the ranking by Australia's Institute for Economics and Peace, and we have succeeded in fighting drug-trafficking, being, on a list of 12 States prepared by the United States State Department, the only one that has succeeded in dealing with the issue. We have also succeeded in dealing with illegal migration. According to the statistics of the International Organization on Migration, we reduced the number of illegal migrants from 36,000 in 2006 to zero in 2014. We have hosted more than 60,000 refugees so far and have been commended for our efforts in that regard.
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> "Mauritania has played a leading role in the establishment of the Group of Five for the Sahel,

which also includes Mali, the Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad. We host the secretariat of this regional organization, where together we coordinate our actions in the areas of security and development. The organization has set out many joint programmes and projects that have gained great interest from our international partners. The five members of the Group have also established a Joint Force and have coordinated their military and security operations with the headquarters located in Mali.

"The issue of human rights holds great importance in our national policy. Since 2012, slavery has been criminalized, and our legal codes have been strengthened to deal with the vestiges of slavery throughout the country. We have also set out a road map that includes 29 recommendations on fighting terrorism. In accordance with the relevant documents of the United Nations, we established a social security agency that deals with the issue and assists all those who have suffered from it across the country.

"We have also resolved the issues that Mauritanian refugees face regarding repatriation and marginalization, making it possible for them to have a decent life and reintegrate into society, as well as providing them with them employment opportunities and enjoyment of their rights.

"The large majority of the countries participating in the Universal Periodic Review of human rights have commended Mauritania and its policies. Mauritanian women have acquired great importance in the country and have been the subject of several initiatives to enable them to be present in all sectors and compete freely in fields that were previously monopolized by men, as well as participate adequately in political and social life. We have worked to enable Mauritanian women to join regional and international organizations by proposing their candidatures, and we have had considerable success in becoming a member of certain important United Nations committees.

"With a view to establishing justice and equality for all people, we have introduced major reforms in our legal codes to guarantee the independence of the judiciary, to fight corruption and bribery and to promote transparency. This has allowed Mauritania to rank high among 26 African countries in this field, according to a study prepared by the International Monetary Fund.

"In view of our important strategic position, we have striven to follow an economic investment policy that guarantees the rights of the investor, with a view to attracting foreign investment. We were awarded 16 points in *Doing Business*, prepared by the World Bank for 2016-2017, and are among the five countries in the world experiencing the highest rate of improvement.

"Crowning the credibility of the country at the regional and continental level has been our chairing of the African Union (AU), following our chairing the AU Peace and Security Council. During our mandates we have striven to participate in reaching peaceful solutions to the crises in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali and Burundi. We have also participated positively in solving the crisis in The Gambia, and we strive continuously to assist other countries in overcoming their crises. We presided over the League of Arab States in 2016, organizing the summit meeting in Nouakchott for the first time.

"With regard to the Palestinian cause, Mauritania calls upon the Assembly to work for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles and other relevant international resolutions.

"We also call for the settlement of the crisis in Yemen by supporting the legitimacy represented by President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, and we welcome every effort by the United Nations in that crisis. With regard to Libya, we call upon all parties concerned to redouble their efforts to stand up to armed groups and restore stability and security to that country. We also urge all parties concerned to make every effort to reach a settlement to the Syrian crisis.

"Climate change is a great challenge facing us all in terms of sustainable development, particularly in the Sahel and Sahara area. We have experienced the phenomenon of the migration of sand dunes, which has destroyed huge agricultural areas and grazing lands. We have prepared appropriate policies to deal with that problem and have invested in the use of renewable sources of energy. We have been commended, for our efforts in that regard, as

one of the few African countries using renewable energy sources,

"Mauritania hosts the headquarters of the Great Green Wall, an ambitious project over 7,000 kilometres long and 15 kilometres wide, connecting the Atlantic coast of West Africa to the Red Sea in the East, benefiting 11 countries of the region. We also welcomed the historic 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change and hope that all parties will uphold their commitments.

"The reform of the United Nations and the adaptation of its bodies to deal with new challenges — particularly the Security Council, which is responsible for international peace and security — have become an urgent necessity. We support every effort in that regard.

"There is no doubt that the establishment of justice and the spreading of a culture of peace and tolerance among people and the renouncing of terrorism, extremism and violence would encourage and help establish peace and security and realize sustainable development in the world.

"The Islamic Republic of Mauritania calls upon all Member States to work together for a world that enjoys multilateralism and respects the principles of the United Nations with a view to establishing peace, stability and security in which people live peacefully together."

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the speaker in exercise of the right of reply, may I remind delegations that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Maleki (Islamic Republic of Iran): As usual, the representative of the Israeli regime today made unfounded allegations against Iran (see A/72/PV.4). He tried to deceive the whole world by distracting public opinion from the horrific policies and practices of his own regime. However, the nature of that regime, which is founded on aggression, occupation, suppression, violence and terror, can in no way be covered up by accusing others.

That is another type of weapon of mass destruction in the hands of that regime: a weapon of mass deception. Nevertheless, he ignored the fact that in the information age that weapon is becoming more useless by the day. Instead of lying, accusing others and attempting to deceive public opinion, he should have explained to the General Assembly why his regime has invaded all of its neighbours, without exception, and even countries beyond the region, and waged more than 15 wars during its very short existence.

Why does it continue to show disrespect for dozens of resolutions adopted by the Assembly, while defying almost 100 Security Council resolutions and rejecting many other United Nations resolutions? He himself referred to some of them today and shamefully insulted those organs for adopting such resolutions.

Why does the main State sponsor of terrorism continue to commit terrorist acts, including supporting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham by, inter alia, providing it with arms and other military assistance?

Ironically, he talked about Israel's exceptional capability. Indeed, that regime has exceptional capability, including exceptional capability in committing all core international crimes — genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression; exceptional capability in aggression and occupation; exceptional capability in barbarism, atrocity and brutality; exceptional capability in killing defenceless women and innocent children; exceptional capability in demolishing homes and destroying schools and hospitals; and exceptional capability in supporting terrorism.

He claimed that his regime had saved many lives in various parts of the world, but he failed to explain why his regime takes the lives of Palestinians on a daily basis. Why does it, as the world's last apartheid regime and warden of the world's largest prison, continue to arrest and imprison thousands of Palestinians and impose the most inhumane blockade against millions of others in the Gaza Strip?

Does he think that by wearing white gloves he can cover up his red hands? Does he think that the world has forgotten the Sabra and Shatila massacre by the Zionist regime of Israel, in which they killed almost 1,000 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in less than 48 hours? He should have explained why his regime, in addition to possessing a large arsenal of sophisticated conventional weapons, continues to possess all types

of weapons of mass destruction — chemical, biological and nuclear ones.

Why does it continue to refuse to become a party to treaties banning weapons of mass destruction, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons? All its nuclear activities and installations remain unsafeguarded as a consequence. Why does it reject the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East despite repeated calls by the United Nations, the international community and consensual resolutions of the Assembly over the past 40 years?

One of the questions that he was expected to answer today is why that regime — which is the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and also hides behind the hypocritical doctrine of strategic ambiguity — so shamelessly continues to lecture the world about non-proliferation and the dangers of Iran's nuclear programme, whose peaceful nature has continued to be certified regularly by the International Atomic Energy Agency, even following the strict implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Those are all questions that he was expected to answer. Instead, he hypocritically tried to abuse the Assembly by merely accusing others. As the madman believes that all other men are mad, he also tried to stir up anxiety with regard to the JCPOA. Intrinsically and by its very nature, that regime is against resorting to diplomacy and favours only conflicts and wars, which is the main sustenance of its life.

The meeting rose at 9 p.m.

United Nations A/72/PV.7

General Assembly

Seventy-second session

Official Records

7th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 20 September 2017, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Expression of sympathy in connection with the earthquakes in Mexico

The President: Before we begin this morning's meeting, I wish to express, on behalf of the General Assembly, our sincere condolences to the Government and people of Mexico in the light of the tragic earthquake that rocked Mexico City yesterday. We regret the loss of life and stand with Mexico at this time of grief.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Luis Videgaray Caso, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United States of Mexico.

Mr. Videgaray Caso (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and the people of Mexico, to thank the Assembly from the bottom of our hearts for the countless expressions of international solidarity from our fellow members of the United Nations.

Yesterday a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck Mexico City and various areas in the centre of the country. The death toll currently stands at 219, with hundreds injured and still more whose whereabouts are unknown. Our current priority is carrying out rescue work and caring for the injured. It has been a harsh blow to Mexico, but we will be able to recover, thanks primarily to the extraordinary solidarity and generosity of our people, who have taken to the streets and to the more than 50 areas affected by the quake, where we need everyone's help.

I particularly wish to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, who called me personally, and the Secretariat, which has been in contact with us from the outset, providing us with advice, support and help in identifying the specific aid we need. Special thanks also go to the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system for helping us to identify the countries that have the specialized teams and equipment we need for rescue operations. We have contacted them and they are already sending assistance. Support for the rescue efforts is currently under way in Mexico City. I thank the President and all of the countries that are generously supporting Mexico at this very difficult time.

Address by Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Finland.

Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Niinistö: Our thoughts today are with the people of Mexico and the Caribbean.

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I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. Finland fully supports your six priorities and we appreciate the focus on people as your mandate's centrepiece.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Secretary-General António Guterres. His determination to reform the United Nations is laudable. Transparency, accountability, efficiency and gender balance should be the guiding principles of the United Nations system. I also welcome his focus on conflict prevention, which, when successful, saves lives and financial resources. Finland continues to advocate the use of mediation in conflict resolution, which can prevent conflicts and decrease human suffering. Those who are marginalized must be given a voice in peace processes. Women, children and young people often pay the highest price in conflicts, but they can also help to find a way out of crises. Finland has helped to establish a Nordic network of women mediators that aims to sustain peace through women's inclusive and meaningful participation in every phase of a peace process.

Peacekeeping and special political missions are at the core of the United Nations mandate. With experience of United Nations operations since 1956, Finland supports the Secretary-General in his efforts to reform and make United Nations peacekeeping more effective. Following the pledge we made in 2015, Finland has significantly increased its participation in United Nations police missions. Finnish police officers, including a specialized team for sexual and gender-based violence, are now deployed in seven United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is my firm view that no United Nations peacekeeper or any other United Nations personnel should be associated with misconduct in any shape or form. There must be zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Secretary-General's initiative for a circle of leadership is timely and welcome.

In wars, there are no winners, and yet conflicts continue. In 2016, 157,000 lives were lost in violent conflicts globally. There are almost 68 million refugees in the world today. The conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and eastern Ukraine are all examples of untold human suffering, and they are not the only ones. The international community has not succeeded in maintaining peace and security.

The grave situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an urgent concern. The North Korean nuclear-weapon programme is a threat to global peace and must be stopped. The Security Council's cooperation on North Korea has been successful, and it is important to ensure that unity can prevail. At the same time, North Korea has continued its provocations, and such behaviour cannot be tolerated. Finland, as part of the European Union, stands firmly behind the sanctions and urges everyone to do the same. We will be able to find a solution only through negotiations, and the North Korean Government must participate without preconditions.

Nuclear weapons represent a severe threat to humankind. As long as they exist there is a risk of a catastrophe. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains the cornerstone of global non-proliferation and the foundation for nuclear disarmament. Finland's approach to the issue is result-oriented and pragmatic. It is crucial to ensure that the countries possessing nuclear weapons are on board for any negotiations. I call on all nuclear-weapon States and countries possessing such weapons to take concrete action on disarmament as soon as possible. It is also important to ensure that the nuclear deal on Iran is honoured by all parties, and I welcome the recent talks on strategic stability between the United States and the Russian Federation. We hope that they will re-start the arms-control talks in Europe and globally.

We must also pay closer attention to other threats, of which I would like to focus on two examples.

First, countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism is a shared priority. As a global body, the United Nations is well placed to promote the fight against terrorism. I look forward to the leadership of the new United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in that area. Secondly, we must take health security more seriously. Diseases travel across borders rapidly and synthetic biology is an emerging threat. We need better prevention and national preparedness, and a global, multi-partner collaboration. The Global Health Security Agenda is an important forum in this area, and Finland and Australia are co-chairing an alliance in support of health-security capacity-building. We must take action before the next pandemic arrives.

Population dynamics are of great importance. Although the most rapid phase of global population growth is receding, in many places populations are still

growing. That is particularly the case in some African countries, where the potential exists for a four-fold increase by the end of the century. Growing populations often result in rapid urbanization. Cities offer people many possibilities, and urbanization's positive potential is huge. But if it is mismanaged it can also increase rootlessness, hopelessness and even radicalization. One antidote is to ensure that all individuals can reach their potential. Economic opportunities and human rights are vital. People must have a positive stake in their own societies. That will require dedicated efforts to empower individuals, including ensuring their access to education and basic services.

Gender equality is a key priority in Finnish foreign policy. As a HeForShe IMPACT Champion, I attach great personal importance to this. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and ensuring sexual rights and comprehensive sexuality education for all are key factors in sustainable development. As a candidate for the UNESCO Executive Board, Finland also considers gender equality, high-quality education and fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to be priorities.

Climate change binds the South and the North together. None of us will be spared its destructive effects. Besides the direct environmental impact, it affects security and is a cause of forced migration. The rapid implementation of the Paris Climate Change Agreement is even more urgent than it was a year ago. The Agreement has a clear goal — keeping rising temperatures below 2 °C. At the moment we are not on that path, and we must speed up our efforts, because the window for action is closing. Our transition from fossil fuels to renewables and energy efficiency must be much faster than what we are seeing right now. Everyone's efforts are needed.

The Arctic is at the forefront of climate change. It is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world. If we lose it, we will lose the whole world. We must find effective ways to slow down the warming of the Arctic. One of those is reducing emissions of black carbon and methane and their impact on the Arctic. The sources of black carbon are well known and solutions exist. What we need is shared willingness and determined steps to deal with the issue. The emissions should be reduced in the Arctic area first and foremost, but global action is also needed, as much of the black carbon is transported in from outside the area. I firmly believe that tackling this issue will be a genuine win-win for the whole of humankind. Finland currently chairs the Arctic Council, and combating climate change is one of our priorities.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Finland celebrates 100 years of independence this year, and the theme of our centennial is "Together". Since our independence began, Finland has supported and respected the rules-based international order. In our interconnected world, promoting national interests also requires international efforts. I strongly believe that global challenges and threats must be addressed not by individual action alone but by the international community. Peace and security, human rights and development belong to all of us. Only together can we make this world a better place.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Finland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Republic of Finland, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Atambaev (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the people of Mexico following the catastrophic earthquake there.

My ancient people have gone through a long and difficult journey of historical development and formation. Centuries ago, we developed our own written language and established our own multi-ethnic State known to history as the Great Kyrgyz Khanate. Unfortunately, subsequent historical events led to the loss of the Khanate and the destruction of the greater part

of our people. We used to be referred to as a vanishing ethnic group. Accordingly, freedom, independence and a sovereign State became our national ideals and an impassioned driving force for our people throughout their historic journey. That journey culminated in 1991 in our achievement of sovereignty.

However, our struggle for freedom, democracy and justice continue. I am proud of my freedom-loving people, who in the past 12 years have executed two popular revolutions against a dictatorial regime and have shown that the only true source of power in the Kyrgyz Republic is the people.

> "In other countries similar events could have led to the destruction of democracy and entailed significant strife, but the Kyrgyz people underwent difficult circumstances and preserved their democracy, which I hope will serve as a model for other countries."

Those are the words of the Secretary-General, and we are eternally grateful to Mr. António Guterres for his balanced assessment of historic events during our country's most recent past.

Like all other countries that have chosen the path of sustainable development, the Kyrgyz Republic is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The well-being and prosperity of humankind is our main goal. Despite the impact of the global economic and financial crisis, the decline in energy prices and the sanctions-based standoff of the global Powers, the gross domestic product of the Kyrgyz Republic has been steadily growing for the past few years, and our currency, the Kyrgyzstan som, is one of the most stable of the countries that make up the Commonwealth of Independent States.

We are embarking on several major projects, including the improvement of our infrastructure. We have achieved energy independence and a stable energy sector. The Kyrgyz Republic, a country that once went nowhere, has reinvented itself as a country of transit.

We are meeting all of our commitments with respect to the social fabric of the country. Salaries for teachers and doctors are on the rise, and pensions and other social benefits are also gradually increasing. Over the past five years, the rate of extreme poverty among the population has decreased by a factor of 4.5.

We have begun a meaningful and systematic campaign to rid the Government of the scourge of corruption, in particular at the top levels of power. In our country, the privileged circles and untouchables of six or seven years ago no longer exist.

We are engaged in dialogue today on equal terms with all our international partners. As we build our independence in foreign policy, we base it exclusively on protecting our national interests, with special priority for regional integration. The borders that we share with our neighbours are becoming gateways to friendship and good neighbourliness.

Our main achievements in recent years have been peace, consensus and stability. The country is changing before our eyes. The Kyrgyz Republic is the first and only country in the post-Soviet Central Asian region with a parliamentary democracy. International organizations, including the United Nations, recognize the Kyrgyz Republic as one of the most free and stable States with a strong civil society in Eurasia.

One achievement of particular note is the introduction of a new electoral model using biometric technologies to identify voters and count votes electronically. We successfully used that system in the 2015 parliamentary elections and in a referendum held last year. The democratic process and openness that characterized the electoral campaign in the Kyrgyz Republic were validated by international observers and, most important, by the country's political parties' acceptance of their outcome. Campaigning is now in full gear for the presidential elections to be held on 15 October. In our view, fair and transparent elections are crucial to our country's stability, and we are determined to achieve that. I firmly believe that our newly elected Government will continue to advance its development as a democratic and open State.

Kyrgyzstan is currently developing a long-term national strategy for sustainable development through 2040. Our strategic goals for future sustainable development include accelerated economic development that provides people with decent jobs; ensuring economic and social well-being; public security and a high quality of life; and developing a parliamentary democracy and a strong civil society.

One of the key initiatives of that strategy is the "Clean Society" *Taza Koom* initiative, designed to develop and promote the principles of electronic Government and open society in our country. During his visit to my country, Secretary-General Guterres noted that the Kyrgyz Republic is not only a pioneer

of democracy in Central Asia, it is also becoming a pioneer in building a digital environment as well as a digital economy.

Based on all the steps that we have taken, I believe that in the near future the Kyrgyz Republic will become an economically developed, socially prosperous and secure country with a developed agro-industrial complex and manufacturing potential. It will be a secure country that will be safe to live and visit in a framework of sustainable tourism, supported by its membership in the Mountain Partnership, with its unique natural, historical and cultural monuments along the great Silk Road. It will be a country of healthy, educated, cultured, free and prosperous people governed by a fair and accountable leadership.

The year 2040 will mark 1,200 years since the advent of the Kyrgyz Khanate in the tenth century, when Kyrgyz statehood reached its apex. We owe it to both our history and our future to reach 2040 as a strong, self-reliant and highly developed State.

The consequences of climate change now threaten all of us to some degree, and mountainous countries such as the Kyrgyz Republic are on the front lines, owing to the complex ecosystems associated with such terrain. The problems of climate change are having an impact on every sector of the Kyrgyz Republic's economy and are causing significant damage from increasingly frequent natural disasters in mountainous areas, including mudflows, landslides, floods and avalanches.

We are particularly concerned about the accelerated melting of Kyrgyz glaciers, which are natural reservoirs and a source of fresh water not only for Central Asia but for the whole world. According to forecasts, by 2025 the total glacier area in the Kyrgyz Republic could decrease by 30 to 40 percent, which could lead to a drop in the water levels of Central Asian rivers. By 2100 the glaciers of the Kyrgyz Republic could vanish altogether. Our country is therefore promoting the implementation of joint projects to preserve glaciers in mountain ecosystems of upstream countries.

The basic essence of the transition to sustainable development is a matter of the survival of humankind and the preservation of the biosphere. Due to climate change, various rare animals and the biodiversity of our mountain ecosystems are threatened with extinction.

In particular, since the nineties, the global population of snow leopards has fallen by half. In 2013, we initiated and conducted the Global Snow Leopard Forum, marking the start of a noble mission: to make preserving that species and its ecosystem a single strategic nature environmental task. Only three weeks ago in Bishkek, we held the second International Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Forum. One of its main outcomes was a proposal by the Kyrgyz Republic to initiate a multi-country project at the regional level, with an emphasis on preserving our national and, no less important, global biodiversity.

In the modern world, mankind is forgetting its origins. In a chaotically fragmented world with increasing divisions, all nations need unifying factors and ideas rather than political ideas that divide peoples over religious beliefs or language. In that regard, our country has come up with a whole range of international projects and measures. In particular, to showcase the greatness of the nomadic civilization to the international community, the Kyrgyz Republic has launched a unique project, the World Nomad Games. The General Assembly provided international recognition for this project for its contribution to intercultural dialogue. Next year, we will be hosting the third Nomad Games, and we invite everyone to participate in them.

In July, we held an international forum on "Altai civilization and related peoples of the Altaic language family". Its main goal was the development and popularization of common heritage and cultural exchange between peoples having common Altai roots, strengthening and expanding cooperation among the States belonging to the Altaic language family.

The international conference initiated by my country on the theme "Islam and the modern secular State" is dedicated to the strengthening of peace and the development of intercultural dialogue. It will be held on 28 and 29 September in Bishkek. We believe it is important to study experiences and exchange information on the interaction of the State and religious institutions and civil societies in secular countries.

All those initiatives represent a contribution by the Kyrgyz Republic to the preservation of peace and stability and the development of cultural diversity and tolerance as a counterweight to contemporary threats of terrorism and radicalism, and we believe that they will have fruitful results.

One of the key factors in good living standards in Central Asia is our mutually beneficial use of water and energy resources. The Kyrgyz Republic

has consistently advocated the development and introduction in the region of economic mechanisms for water use. The world's limited water resources will sooner or later lead to an understanding that water is an economic resource that requires reasonable use. I wish to emphasize in particular that water-use issues in Central Asia can and should be solved only by the States of the region through an open and constructive dialogue, taking into account the interests and needs of all countries. It is unacceptable for international and regional organizations to impose their own approaches and ways of developing cooperation in this area on the countries of Central Asia.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the problem of managing the numerous uranium tailings in the Kyrgyz Republic that we inherited from the Soviet Union. They pose a threat to the entire region. We all know that a number of large uranium-tailing dump sites are located in close proximity to rivers and water sources. In the event of an accidents at a tailing site, pollution of the region's rivers with highly toxic waste could lead to large-scale ecological and humanitarian consequences and would imperil the lives and health of millions of people and even socioeconomic development in every Central Asian country.

That is why, in 2012, the Kyrgyz Republic initiated a proposal to adopt a special resolution on the matter of the uranium legacy in Central Asia, and the General Assembly adopted that text as resolution 68/218 in 2013. In the past five years we have made significant progress in solving problems of radiation and environmental safety. Now we see that it is time for a new Assembly resolution that takes account of the results that have been achieved. Today, here in New York, we will be having a special meeting on the issue, initiated by the Kyrgyz Republic and others. We believe that the meeting will enable us to come up with new programmes and joint measures aimed at recultivating uranium-tailing sites.

With regard to matters of peace and security and the sustainable development of all countries on the planet, I also want to mention the problem of terrorism. The international community must step up its efforts to fight terrorism, extremism and related problems such as illegal drug trafficking, trafficking in humans and arms, and money laundering. Unfortunately, the international community's measures have been inadequate and have sometimes led to confrontation between States, while it is only by joint action and efforts that we can effectively counter the threats of terrorism and extremism.

I should not omit to mention the current situation in Myanmar and the plight of the Muslims there. Kyrgyzstan resolutely condemns the violence being perpetrated against the ethnic minority in Myanmar, and we earnestly call on all parties to the conflict to engage in peaceful negotiations.

We also urge all countries around the globe to uphold their commitment to the provisions of the international conventions on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

It is encouraging to see the increasing role that the United Nations is playing in our collective efforts to confront the challenges and threats that we face today. But as that role increases, so does its accountability. It is the 15 members of the Security Council that currently decide the fate of the world. The consensus they reach determines matters of war and peace, security and stability in various parts of our planet. Moreover, the five permanent members of the Council can always block any decision. Kyrgyzstan therefore advocates the adoption of urgent measures to improve the Security Council that will enable it to take into consideration the interests of a majority of States.

Our world will continue to develop and change. It will continue to confront difficulties and crises, make breakthroughs and have successes in development. But all of us are united by the desire to preserve peace and concord on Earth. For that to happen, we need to provide equitable conditions and possibilities for development in every country, so that no one is left behind or left to cope with troubles and problems alone.

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Change Agreement and other agreements on the international agenda must remain the main priority of our joint action as an international community. Only together can we build a world based on cultural diversity; on dialogue, not sanctions; on preventive measures and greater accountability; a world where no one will be forgotten or left behind. So let us unite our efforts and help all people on Earth to live better and attain even a little more joy. Together we can build a world that provides a dignified life for everyone on our planet Earth.

(*spoke in Kyrgyz; translation provided by the delegation*)

As I end my speech, I would now like to address my beloved Kyrgyz people, my dear compatriots, in Kyrgyz. A thousand years later, the Kyrgyz nomads

have found their way again. For us to find that way, thousands of our forefathers had to sacrifice their lives and thousands of our mothers were left blinded by grief. Are there any mountains where no Kyrgyz bones are buried? Are there any valleys where no Kyrgyz blood has flowed?

In a few days' time, the Kyrgyz people will elect their new leader. Let us not lose our way by following the oligarchs and leaders of other countries. We cannot let others trample on Kyrgyz leaders ever again. We cannot let our national wealth and our lands be sold off or given away again while ordinary people suffer. Let us not be deceived by money. Let us not be deceived by fancy words. Let us not look deceitfully at one another. Let us be honest with one another. We must preserve our dignity and our unity. We must preserve our motherland. We must preserve our people.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Kyrgyz Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Almazbek Atambayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Aliyev: For more than 25 years, Armenia has occupied 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan — Nagorno Karabakh and seven other regions of our country. Nagorno Karabakh is an ancient and historical part of Azerbaijan. As a result of Armenian aggression, almost 20 per cent of the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan is under Armenian occupation. More than 1 million of Azerbaijanis have become refugees and internally displaced persons. Armenia has conducted a policy of ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis in Armenia, in Nagorno Karabakh and seven other regions of Azerbaijan.

Armenia committed genocide against Azerbaijanis in Khojaly. The Khojaly genocide is already officially recognized by more than 10 countries. On February 26, 1992, Armenia committed war crimes, killing 613 peaceful residents of Khojaly, among them 106 women and 63 children. One of those war criminals who committed that terrible crime against humanity is the current Armenian President.

Leading international organizations adopted resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the territory of Azerbaijan. In 1993, the Security Council adopted resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993), and 884 (1993), demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the territory of Azerbaijan. Other international organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, adopted similar decisions and resolutions.

Armenia does not implement them. For 24 years, Armenia has ignored Security Council resolutions, and unfortunately it has not been punished for that. In some cases, Security Council resolutions are implemented within days. In our case, resolutions have gone unimplemented for 24 years. That is a demonstration of double standards, and it is unacceptable. International sanctions must be imposed on Armenia. A major United Nations reform should be the creation of a mechanism for implementing Security Council resolutions.

Armenia does everything in its power to maintain the status quo and block substantive negotiations. The co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group — France, Russia and the United States — have stated on several occasions that the status quo is unacceptable. How can such a corrupt, failed State, ruled by a despotic, medieval regime, violate international law for so many years and ignore Security Council resolutions and statements by the world's leading countries? Because there is a double standard. There is no international pressure on the aggressor, no international sanctions imposed on the Armenian dictatorship. That policy must end. It is not only a demonstration of injustice, it also creates the impression that the Armenian dictatorship can continue its policy of terror.

In April 2016, Armenia committed another war crime on the line of contact, attacking our cities and villages. In that attack, six Azerbaijani civilians were killed, among them one child, and 26 were wounded. Hundreds of our houses were destroyed. Azerbaijan had to defend its citizens. Through a successful counter-attack, Azerbaijan liberated some territories in the three occupied areas — Agdere, Fuzuli and Jabrayil — and installed its national flag in the liberated territories. The Armenian leadership should not forget that lesson, or the results of their next provocation will be more painful for them.

When it loses on the battlefield, Armenia resorts to the cruel policy of attacking our cities and villages. On 4 July, Armenia launched a targeted attack on Alkhanli village in Fuzuli district with 82 and 120 millimetre mortars and grenade launchers, killing two civilians, two-year old Zahra Guliyeva and her grandmother. On 7 August, a 13-year-old boy in the Tovuz area, which borders Armenia, was wounded by Armenian soldiers. The international community must stop Armenian fascism and terror.

Azerbaijan is committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but at the same time it will defend its citizens, in line with the Charter of the United Nations, if Armenian military provocations continue. If necessary, Azerbaijan will again punish the aggressor, as it did in April 2016. The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno Karabakh conflict must be resolved on the basis of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan must be completely restored.

Despite the enormous difficulties caused by the Armenian occupation, Azerbaijan has developed rapidly and successfully. It is an active member of the United Nations, and in 2011 was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, receiving the votes of 155 countries. An absolute majority of Member States demonstrated their support for Azerbaijan and its policy. For Azerbaijan, which at that time had been independent for only 20 years, that was a great success.

Azerbaijan is a stable, modern, democratic country. The development of democracy and the protection of human rights are among the top priorities of our Government. All fundamental freedoms are fully guaranteed in Azerbaijan, including freedom of expression, of the press, of assembly and of religion.

Azerbaijan is one of the world's recognized centres of multiculturalism, which is a State policy in Azerbaijan, where representatives of all ethnic groups and religions live in peace and harmony. In Azerbaijan we declared 2016 a Year of Multiculturalism and 2017 a Year of Islamic Solidarity.

Unlike Armenia, which is a mono-ethnic country with almost no national minorities and where xenophobia is a State policy, Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic country. Our society's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is a big asset. In that regard, Armenia, where Islamophobia has reached a peak, has committed many acts of vandalism, destroying all mosques in the occupied territories.

Azerbaijan has hosted numerous international events aimed at strengthening interreligious dialogue. Among them are the seventh Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the World Religious Leaders Summit, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, on four occasions, and the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, on five occasions, as well as other important events.

As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe, in 2008 Azerbaijan launched the Baku Process, which is supported by the United Nations. The main goal of the Baku Process is to strengthen dialogue, partnership and cooperation between the Muslim world and Europe.

In 2015, Azerbaijan hosted the first European Games, in which 6,000 athletes from 50 countries participated. This year, we hosted the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games, with almost 3,000 athletes from 54 countries, so in the space of two years our capital city of Baku was the venue for both the European and the Islamic Games, in a major contribution to promoting multiculturalism. In a demonstration of Azerbaijan's status as one of the world's leading sporting countries, the Azerbaijani team came second overall at the first European Games and first at the Islamic Solidarity Games. Further proof of our achievement in this area is the fact that Azerbaijan finished fourteenth overall at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in terms of medals, winning 18 in total.

Azerbaijan has made significant progress in social and economic development. Our economy has more than tripled since 2004, and we have created more than 1.6 million jobs, keeping our unemployment level one of the lowest in the world at 5 per cent. We

have prioritized poverty reduction; our poverty levels have gone from more than 40 per cent in 2004 to 5 or 6 per cent. Our hard-currency reserves are equal to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and our State's foreign debt is less than 20 per cent of GDP. In 2009 Azerbaijan was named leading reformer of the world in the World Bank's *Doing Business* report. The Davos World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report for 2016-2017 ranked Azerbaijan thirty-seventh of 138 countries. In 2015, Azerbaijan received the South-South Award in recognition of its outstanding achievements in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, and since 2010 has been classified as a country with high human development. Our rapid development of our space industry has enabled Azerbaijan to join the world's space club with Azerspace and Azersky, its two telecommunication and field observation satellites, with a third, Azerspace-2, to be launched soon.

Today, Azerbaijan exports intellectual as well as industrial and agricultural products. Our State agency for services and social innovations for citizens, ASAN, is a model for modern public relations and services. With 251 services under one roof, the agency's absolute transparency and zero tolerance for corruption and bribery has made it attractive to many countries. As a purely Azerbaijani brand in the five years since it was founded, it has provided more than 1.6 million services to 5 million people. The total number of applications is 17 million and the public's rating of ASAN is 98 per cent. In 2015, in recognition of its contribution to excellence, creativity and simplification of the delivery of public services, ASAN received the United Nations Public Service Award.

The main goal of our policies is improving the lives of our citizens. Since 2004, salaries have increased by 5.6 times and pensions 8.2 times. With no foreign financial support, we have built almost 100 new settlements and towns for refugees and internally displaced persons affected by the Armenian occupation. We have thereby improved the living conditions of more than 250,000 people, providing them with new houses and flats and building 152 schools, 59 medical centres, and 60 kindergartens in their towns and settlements. Overall, since 2004 we have built or renovated more than 3,000 schools and 600 hospitals and medical centres. Azerbaijan's literacy levels are close to 100 per cent. Every year more than 5 million people — half of the population — receive medical check-ups totally financed by the State budget.

Azerbaijan plays an important role in the global energy market. As a reliable supplier of oil and gas to international markets, we provide energy security for many countries throughout the world. Today Azerbaijan, together with its international partners, is close to completing the $40 billion Southern Gas Corridor project, one of the largest infrastructure projects in the world.

Another important priority of ours is transportation. Situated as it is between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan is making wise use of its geographical location to become one of Eurasia's leading transportation hubs. In recent years we have built six international airports and 11,000 kilometres of modern highways and roads. Azerbaijan's 270 vessels make up the biggest trade fleet in the Caspian Sea, and our modern shipbuilding yards are capable of building all types and sizes of ships. We are also modernizing our railroad infrastructure, and most of our territory can now be reached by rail. Next year we will inaugurate an international trade seaport that will be the biggest in the Caspian region. Azerbaijan is making significant investments in East-West and North-South transportation corridors in order to create the shortest possible routes across the country in both directions.

The President returned to the Chair.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that last year we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the restoration of our independence. Azerbaijan's successful development has demonstrated once again that only when a country is free and independent and its destiny is in the hands of its people can it achieve success. The greatest happiness of the people of Azerbaijan is that we live in an independent country conducting independent polices — policies based on the national interests of our people.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guyana.

Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Granger: Let me begin by expressing the deep condolences and solidarity of the Government and people of Guyana to the victims of yesterday's earthquake in Mexico and those of Hurricane Maria, which virtually destroyed the Commonwealth of Dominica two days ago.

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana congratulates you, Mr. President, on your election to lead the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We are confident that under your guidance progress will be made in advancing the international agenda and realizing the theme of this year's Assembly, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". Guyana also appreciates the sterling performance of your predecessor, Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji, in his stewardship of the Assembly during the past year. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Secretary-General António Guterres on his appointment last year and to wish him a successful tenure.

Today, I am speaking of people, peace and the planet. Nothing is more important in this general debate than ensuring that all representatives here respect its theme, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". First, the theme enjoins us to focus on people — people of all countries and in all circumstances. It is about the human condition of people in States that are large and small, rich and poor, strong and weak. It is about humankind's condition everywhere on Earth.

The world is facing several serious humanitarian crises. In too many parts of the world, children still die from preventable diseases or go to bed hungry. In some places, women are denied equal opportunities for enjoying a good life. The gap between the world's rich and poor remains unacceptably wide. Conflicts within States have spawned international refugee crises, resulting in the displacement of millions from their homelands.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent our collective desire and determination to eradicate hunger and poverty from our planet while promoting equal opportunities in education, employment and social justice for both men and women. The adoption of the SDGs has catalysed our aspirations for a better world into concrete and forward-looking actions and objectives. The Goals seek to promote respect for people's inherent dignity and their rights as human beings. However, their advancement is being obstructed by human rights violations, by people's involuntary migration from their homelands and by terrorism and warfare. The challenge for the United Nations is resolving to reinforce respect for the rights of citizens within the governance structures of our Member States.

Secondly, I am speaking of planet Earth. A sustainable planet is humankind's ultimate patrimony. Nothing is more vital to people's survival. We have been indifferent too long to the need to protect the planet, and now its sustainability is threatened on many fronts. Climate change is not a fiction or the invention of a few extremists. This year, the small island States of the Caribbean and parts of North America have felt the devastating fury of a series of hurricanes — Harvey, Irma, José, Katia, Lee and Maria, to whose frequency and ferocity humankind has contributed through the reckless exploitation of Earth's resources.

Hurricane Irma was a deadly, destructive portent of the extreme vulnerability and fragility of the small island developing States and low-lying coastal States of the Caribbean, and Guyana is playing its part, within the limits of its resources, to provide relief to the affected populations of our sister Caribbean States. Guyana signed and celebrated the Paris Agreement on Climate Change last year in this very Hall. We renew our commitment to its goals this year in a demonstration of Guyana's pioneering role in global environmental stewardship. It must be remembered that in 1989 — three years before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio in 1992 — Guyana had the foresight to enter into an environmental covenant with the international community by dedicating 360,000 hectares of its rainforests,

> "to develop, demonstrate and make available to Guyana and the international community systems, methods and techniques for the sustainable

> utilization of the multiple resources of the tropical forest and the conservation of biological diversity".

Twenty years after that international initiative, Guyana entered into an agreement with the Kingdom of Norway,

> "to work together to provide the world with a relevant, replicable model of how Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, known as the REDD-plus programme, plus conservation and sustainable forest management, can align the development objectives of the forest countries with the need to combat climate change".

Guyana is part of the Guiana Shield, one of the world's last remaining blocks of pristine rainforest. The Guiana Shield is the source of 15 per cent of the world's freshwater reserves. Its biodiversity provides ecosystem services, such as food, fresh water and medicinal products. It provides environmental services, such as the regulation of the water cycle, water quality and pollination. The Shield's forests capture and store carbon, mitigating the greenhouse effect. In other words, the Shield is essential to life on Earth. Guyana calls on the United Nations to help protect and preserve the Guiana Shield as a global resource for the survival and sustainability of our planet.

I will now speak of peace. Striving for peace has been the principal purpose and preoccupation of this Organization throughout its existence. A good life for the world's peoples and sustainable use of the planet's resources are predicated on peace with justice, including justice within and between States. The world is weary of war. Striving for peace must be humankind's ceaseless quest. The United Nations is the paramount global instrument of peace. It has a vital role to play in ensuring respect for international law through the International Court of Justice and the Security Council. In striving for peace, we must aim to resolve long-standing inter-State conflicts. In that regard, Guyana supports the call for reform of the Security Council, in order to give an even greater voice to developing countries.

We reiterate our support for a two-State solution to the Palestine-Israeli conflict. We affirm the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland and a dignified existence. We demand the withdrawal of the injurious economic embargo on the Caribbean island of Cuba, which frustrates its right to development.

Striving for peace and the right to development have been Guyana's most serious concerns since national independence in 1966. When I addressed the Assembly last September (see A/71/PV.8), I explained the danger that we have been facing on our borders as a consequence of the territorial claims of our neighbour to the West, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I outlined to the world's nations the peril that Guyana was enduring on its borders at the hands of Venezuela. Venezuela's claim to Guyana's territory, however, has not diminished or been diverted. Guyana remains imperilled. Disturbing developments in Venezuela have attracted the world's attention and roused the concerns of many of us about the privations of its people.

The Caribbean people want the Caribbean to be a zone of peace. Venezuela's claim on Guyana's territorial integrity, however, would be a threat to that zone and that peace. Venezuela is more than four times the size of Guyana, and yet it claims two-thirds of Guyana's territory, including its maritime space. We depend on our territorial and maritime resources for our country's development and for propelling our people out of poverty. After 51 years of Guyana's independence, the Venezuelan claim persists. An eminent international tribunal provided a full, perfect and final settlement of the issue 118 years ago, in 1899. Venezuela repudiated that arbitral award in 1962 in the Special Committee on Decolonization, as British Guiana — as we were then — strove to achieve its independence.

This is a warning to the world, through the Assembly, that peace will be jeopardized in our region if justice does not prevail, not only within Venezuela, but also with regard to its border controversy with Guyana. Four Secretaries-General have been seized of the Venezuelans' claim. The choice has become one between a just and peaceful settlement in accordance with international law, and a Venezuelan posture of attrition that is increasingly blustering and militaristic. In this matter, protraction is the enemy of resolution and the ally of sustained conflict.

Fortunately, as they indicated publicly, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and current Secretary-General António Guterres have both decided that if, based on the 1966 Geneva Agreement, significant progress has not been made by the end of 2017 towards arriving at a full agreement on a settlement of the controversy, the International Court of Justice will be the next means of peaceful settlement, unless Guyana and Venezuela jointly request otherwise. Guyana has

been working assiduously with the Secretary-General's personal representative and looks to the international community to ensure that Venezuela is not allowed to thwart the process of judicial settlement, which is the clear and agreed path to peace and justice.

The people of the world yearn to fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment — an attainable objective of the Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by the United Nations. Peace for the world's peoples is the mandate of the United Nations. Peace can be achieved by addressing the world's humanitarian crises, promoting justice within and between nations and resolving long-standing conflicts between States.

Planet Earth can provide a good life for all. The planet can be protected from the ravages of climate change and reckless damage to its ecology and biodiversity. United, the nations gathered in this Hall can fulfil the promise of the Charter of the United Nations and the theme of the General Assembly to focus on people, strive for peace and protect the planet.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Guyana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. David Arthur Granger, President of the Republic of Guyana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Čović (*spoke in Bosnian; English text provided by the delegation*): I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the task you have just embarked on in leading the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I am convinced that your tact and diplomacy, which we in Bosnia and Herzegovina have witnessed first-hand, will help the most important body of the United Nations make new progress and effectively face new challenges. My gratitude also goes to the outgoing President for the leadership he showed during the seventy-first session.

I would also like to join others in congratulating His Excellency Mr. António Guterres on his appointment as Secretary-General of the United Nations. His noble and wise intention to devote more attention to building bridges to connect us all in the years ahead will certainly have all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's support.

In a world dominated by uncertainty and insecurity, it is simply not possible to overstate the importance of the principles and the multilateral framework defined for us by the founders of the United Nations. The strength of the Organization lies in both our individual and shared strengths in our efforts to eradicate diseases, hunger, terrorism and every other threat to human existence. In doing so, of course, we must admit to ourselves how necessary and important it is to use thoughtful and constructive measures to bring the United Nations system closer to its surroundings and enable it to adapt so that it can anticipate the challenges its environment presents and respond to them with a force that is far stronger than the simple sum of our individual abilities.

We continue to witness and to be deeply concerned about the ongoing suffering of the Syrian people. Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns every form of violence against Syria's civilian population. The violence must stop. The dignity of every Syrian woman, man and child, and of every Syrian refugee, must be restored. Their belief in the possibility of recovery and opportunities for a new life must also be restored. We and many other delegations in this Hall today will continue to call for a peaceful and political solution to the conflict through negotiations. That process must be owned by the Syrian people alone, based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), and with the assistance of the international community and the United Nations, led by the Special Envoy for Syria, whose selfless efforts to continue the negotiations in Geneva are highly appreciated.

It seems superfluous to repeat that there can be no peace and prosperity for the Israeli people if the same is not provided for the Palestinians, and vice versa. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict represents the most serious

unresolved problem in the Middle East, and the current absence of any negotiations between the parties is disturbing. Both nations deserve better. Again — and this has been the case for decades — the journey towards peace has been too slow and has become more and more complex. It is therefore essential that we steadfastly recall the ultimate goal, which is the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side by side, in safety and within recognized borders. Bosnia and Herzegovina still believes that this goal can be achieved if both parties can fulfil their obligations as set forth in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Evil has existed throughout human history. Sometimes it is on the margins of our communities. Sometimes, to a greater or lesser degree, it is inside them. It does not always take the same form or manifest itself with the same intensity. Terrorism is undoubtedly the greatest evil of our times, and its form and strength represent the greatest threat we have to international peace and security. Destructive forces have always had deep roots and many different faces, but there can be no justification for their existence. We need united, concentrated efforts, along with a multidimensional and integrated approach, to overcome terrorism and permanently eliminate the fear of terror from our communities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to contribute to the full implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the activities of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. We particularly welcome the efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres in strengthening the counter-terrorism capacities of the United Nations and, in that regard, the establishment of the new Office of Counter-Terrorism. For our part, we are ready to constantly strengthen cooperation at the regional, subregional and international levels, especially in the areas of information collection and exchange. As a member of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, we will continue to support the Coalition's efforts to liberate entire communities and help them recover from the suffering and harm imposed by Da'esh and its global network.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions aimed at bringing persons involved in financing, planning, preparing or executing terrorist acts to justice. Furthermore, we fully share the view that for the long-term eradication of the evil of terrorism and violent extremism, it is necessary to continuously invest in efforts along the entire spectrum of interconnected areas, from the eradication of injustice, inequality, poverty and a lack of freedom to improving understanding among those who differ, and to strengthen intercultural dialogue and generally accepted democratic values. Once we start thinking that we have done enough in all those areas, we need to start again and redouble our efforts.

A world without the threat of the total destruction of humankind is less utopian if there are fewer means and arms for destruction. Disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are therefore still prerequisites for the global peace and security that we all strive for. In that context, Bosnia and Herzegovina joins the strong condemnation of the nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We also call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to comply without delay, fully and unconditionally, with its obligations under all relevant Security Council resolutions.

My faith in the value of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is as strong today as it was two years ago, when we adopted it. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has received due institutional attention, based on its significance and the nobility of the goals it sets for us. The roles have been defined, the goals are clear and coordination has been established.

For us, as well as for other developing countries burdened by the discrepancies between wishes and possibilities, strong political will and decisive practical steps in the right direction will not always be enough. Fulfilling the noble and ambitious Sustainable Development Goals requires knowledge and norms that many Member States do not have. It might produce an additional burden on the already overburdened State budgets. Assistance in formulating strategies and policies, transferring technologies, providing financial resources and measuring progress is therefore indisputably crucial, along with, of course, countries' full ownership of the implementation processes. In that connection, we have fully understood and accepted the strong interconnectedness of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. We have ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and have chosen to follow its guidelines. It is a debt to our children and to the planet that has to be unconditionally fulfilled.

Whether in our past, present or future, women in my country hold high positions that rightfully and naturally belong to them. The role of women is vital to the development and prosperity of the family as well as of society as a whole. In post-conflict environments, women are always the first to extend the hand of reconciliation. In times of great challenges and risks, we need the strength and natural ability of women more than ever in order to pursue peaceful solutions.

Although we are extremely proud of the significant progress we have made in implementing the provisions of the historic Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, we are also aware of the areas where it is possible and necessary to do considerably more. We will certainly continue to invest in additional efforts to strengthen and empower Bosnian women and girls in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Another social group that deserves special attention is young people, who are a constant source of change and an incubator of inventive solutions to the problems we inherit from the past. When healthy, educated, and employed, they are the engine that drives our societies forward. Environments in which young people have limited access to education, economic development and decision-making processes are subject to frustration, social unrest and instability. For that reason, a significant part of the reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina is dedicated to creating conditions for reducing youth unemployment, corresponding to targets 8.5 and 8.6 of Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda.

Unfortunately, in Bosnia and Herzegovina we know all too much about the high price of war. For us, preventive diplomacy is a tool that, when used at the right time, can help ensure that wars are never repeated anywhere. There are many reasons why, on a global level, the United Nations system must be at the heart of all activities that use preventive measures in order to resolve crises and prevent people from being displaced from their homes.

Again, much of the responsibility for prevention lies at other levels. Within our communities, we must counter all symptoms of trouble and conflicts. We must correct social injustice, reconcile what seems irreconcilable, persevere in compromise, strive for pluralistic and inclusive solutions, give equal weight to our own rights and those of others and constantly seek ways to find a common language. I believe that prevention and mediation, as well as conflict management techniques and conflict resolution in divided societies, should be applied first within the region at issue, with regional actors who generally better understand the opposing sides, their reasoning and their different views of the problem.

We are proud of our participation in the United Nations peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Cyprus, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. We consider that to be the most direct contribution of Bosnia and Herzegovina to building world peace. We also see our involvement in United Nations missions as a way to do things that are possible today but that not long ago were almost impossible to even imagine, and so to help people in areas affected by conflicts.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has learned lessons from its difficult past, and for the future it has chosen to follow the principles set by the founders of the European Union 60 years ago. We have adopted the European path, and, choosing between cooperation and confrontation, we chose and will always choose cooperation in the search for common compromises.

On our own, but also with the unselfish help of our European friends, we do everything we can to find as many opportunities for open dialogue as possible, and we use each of those opportunities to build even more trust and mutually beneficial connections for our people, who, despite difficulties and complicated times, have more common links and interests than we, their leaders, are sometimes willing to recognize. Reconciliation, trust, partnership and cooperation among all of us, in contexts both broad and narrow, must become living and long-term principles for a stable and secure future. Commitment to regional initiatives and constructive action through the regional organizations to which we belong are therefore high on the list of our foreign-policy priorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now doing everything it can to speed up its progress to where it really belongs, within the framework of a strong European family, whose values it shares. Reform and other processes that we are pursuing for that purpose are not always simple or easy, but we see them as a unique opportunity to accelerate the harmonization of our economic, social and institutional development with what awaits us tomorrow in the European Union. We will therefore continue to fulfil the obligations we have undertaken in

order to reach the status of candidate by the beginning of 2018 with true commitment, which will be a powerful and much needed boost to internal consolidation and the further acceleration of integration processes.

However, it is with concern that I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that my country is going through a period of important challenges. I am deeply convinced that one people in Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be happy and prosperous if the other two are not, and indeed if all other people living in our country are not. In that regard, I believe that it is up to us in Bosnia and Herzegovina to make a crucial step to adopt changes to our electoral legislation by the end of this year, in accordance with the decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As in the past, we expect understanding and support of the international community in solving the issue, because it is of vital importance for further democratizing and achieving our full integration into the European Union.

Allow me to conclude with a reminder that all of our needs — economic, social, security, political and cultural — can be very diverse, as are our possibilities for achieving them. The choices we make every day to ensure prosperity for our people also vary from one Member State to another. I am convinced that the future of humankind will largely depend on our ability to turn our differences into advantages. We expect the United Nations system to guide us in that and to assist us, above all, in building a system based on unity in diversity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Dragan Čović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodriguez, President of the Republic of Panama

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodriguez, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodriguez, President of the Republic of Panama, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Varela Rodriguez (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin my remarks by extending my condolences and solidarity to the people and the Government of Mexico for the victims of the earthquake that struck yesterday, as well as to the peoples of Cuba, the United States and the nations of the Caribbean for the deaths and heavy material damage left in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Harvey and now being inflicted by Hurricane Maria, especially in Dominica. Our prayers are with the victims and their families. Such natural disasters send a clear message that we must continue to forge ties of solidarity and that our countries' protective and security capacities should be used solely to help each other, not to create conflict.

I would like to congratulate you, President Lajčák, on your election to steer the debates at this session of the General Assembly, and to extend warm greetings to Secretary-General António Guterres. In my capacity as President of the Republic of Panama, I pledge the support of my Government and country. From this rostrum, with respect and affection, I would also like to send my warmest greetings to the people of Panama, who have given me the opportunity to serve them.

For a fourth consecutive year, I am returning to the Assembly as the world is beset by challenges such as organized crime, terrorism and natural disasters that affect all our populations. Another major challenge we must tackle is the increase in migration flows driven by war, poverty and inequality. Against that backdrop, the theme of the Assembly at this session — "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet" — will encourage Heads of State and Government to engage in dialogue and reach agreement on concrete actions that we can take to bring about peace in the world.

Peace is a human construct, the fruit of coexisting respectfully and meeting the basic needs of individuals, responsibly, all the while preserving the planet thatis our home. The most effective and appropriate way to resolve the problems that currently affect the Earth's inhabitants is to ensure that human beings are always central to our decision-making. Such humanitarian policy has been the lodestar of my leadership of Panama for the past 39 months, as I have sought to build a nation where justice and equality prevail, without

making innocent people pay the price or causing unnecessary conflict.

Democracy is not just about electing Heads of State in free and fair elections. Rather, it is about those of us who are elected understanding that the power bestowed on us should be used only to serve those who elected us; about managing the wealth of the State with transparency, fairness and social justice for the benefit of the people; and about leading our countries peacefully, on a basis of dialogue and consensus. In 2015, in his opening remarks to the seventh Summit of the Americas, Pope Francis said,

> "Panama's geographic position in the centre of the American continent, making it the meeting point between North and South, between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, is surely a call, *pro mundi beneficio*, to generate a new order of peace and justice and to promote solidarity and cooperation while respecting the just autonomy of each nation."

I have always borne in mind Panama's role as a facilitator of dialogue and understanding. Ours is a country of unity at the service of the international community. We stand ready to cooperate as a strategic ally and to contribute our resources in the interest of addressing the common problems afflicting the region and the world at large.

At the Summit of the Americas, which took place in Panama, there was a historic rapprochement between two countries that had held divergent positions for more than half a century — Cuba and the United States. They began a frank conversation about putting an end to their estrangement. As we near the next Summit of the Americas, in Lima, we must approach it with a constructive spirit and an openness to dialogue to analyse the problems of the region and uphold peace and unity across the Americas.

The Americas and the world are happy to see that Colombia is successfully continuing to implement its Peace Agreement. In his recent visit, Pope Francis delivered an important message about the consolidation of the process — which benefits everyone, not just the Colombian people — that we must accept the mistakes that have been made, correct them and seek reconciliation.

However, our continent is facing a problem that transcends borders — the growth of drug production and trafficking. It is vital that the leaders of the Americas unite in joining forces to tackle that challenge, one that threatens the peace of our peoples, particularly in the northern triangle. We cannot allow drug trafficking to disrupt the peace that has been restored at such cost in Central America and Colombia. Drug trafficking condemns our people to poverty; affects State budgets; makes us invest resources in security instead of education, health, housing and transportation; challenges the authority of Governments; and subverts the loyalty of those whose duty it is to comply with and uphold the rule of law.

Panama reaffirms its commitment to combating drug trafficking head-on. We will dedicate the full force of our efforts and resources to helping the region to eliminate that scourge. Moreover, we appeal to the leaders and Heads of State of the countries that produce and consume drugs to support us in this fight. Every dollar generated by drug trafficking represents death in our region.

The political crisis in Venezuela is having a profound impact on the region. We must stop the clashes that have provoked unnecessary violence, hurting all Latin Americans. It is urgent that we recognize that to resolve the conflict, both sides must seek a path to understanding and agree on a defined road map for free and transparent presidential elections in 2018. It would be a grave error if the Government of Venezuela insisted on installing a one-party political model by force. That would aggravate its social and humanitarian crisis, increasing migratory flows that could result in complex situations in neighbouring countries. We should all stand with the Venezuelan people to help them overcome this crisis.

Our continent must emerge united from the Summit of the Americas in Lima if we are to combat inequality and drug trafficking together. In that regard, Panama is willing to play a front-line role, building bridges of understanding and dialogue that can make our region stronger and more united. I call on the Heads of State of the Americas to go to Lima with that vision of unity so that we can ensure that the hemisphere makes steady progress towards development.

We live in a world that is being battered by acts of terrorism, natural disasters and organized crime. There is no time or space for us to waste effort fighting over temporary ideological differences. Countries must unite their capacities to address the evils affecting peoples beyond their borders. Panama strongly condemns all

acts of terrorism anywhere the world, which can never be justified.

Today I respectfully call on the countries that are members of the Security Council to strengthen their measures and decisions promoting sustainable peace in places such as Syria and Iraq. I must also strongly condemn irresponsible leaders, such as those in North Korea, who seek to destabilize peaceful coexistence in the world.

Panama believes that a strong multilateral system can be used to achieve the objectives we set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and we are ready to continue playing a leadership role. That is why we support the Secretary-General's process of reform designed to make the United Nations more transparent, efficient and better able to respond to the needs of a world of more than 7 billion people. If we can share the wealth of our planet, no one will be left behind.

Those reforms must ensure that the United Nations unites us more effectively and connects Heads of State with the pain of people suffering from war, natural disasters and organized crime. Multilateral cooperation is vital to that process, which is not a question merely of economic resources but also of the transfer of capacity and best practices. Middle-income countries such as Panama can contribute to the transfer of knowledge and technology, generating tangible benefits for populations and contributing to peace.

Panama's commitment to that path is unwavering. We therefore call for the establishment of a United Nations regional headquarters in our country. We are willing to build facilities for a centre for regional humanitarian assistance that will enable us to provide timely support, when it is needed, to countries in the region that are dealing with natural disasters, as we did recently with the air and maritime bridges bringing aid to countries affected by Hurricane Irma, which struck Cuba, the Caribbean and the United States.

As President of the Republic of Panama, I have two clear goals: to make politics a service and ensure that my country continues as a functional democracy. We are recovering hundreds of millions of misappropriated dollars that belong to the people, and we are investing that money in the people, using the State's resources to benefit all Panamanians. Thanks to the honest Government that I lead, the increased revenues from our broadened Canal and the sustained economic growth of the past few years, we are improving the living conditions of all Panamanians.

We have significantly increased the salaries of civil servants, police officers, educators, doctors and nurses. We have reviewed the money going into pensions and scholarships and strengthened conditional monetary assistance. We are also laying thousands of kilometres of roads, investing in major basic health projects and water-purifying plants, and building tens of thousands of houses for our poorest citizens, as well as modern, bilingual schools, sports and cultural centres, new metro lines and a modern mass-transport system.

We are working towards those objectives with a sense of responsibility and transparency, without increasing any taxes, and moving forward steadily towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. That is the value of an honest Government, which, bound by social justice and equality to distribute the riches of the people, represents a road to a peaceful society, a decent quality of life and a fairer world in which we are all treated equally.

All human beings deserve a decent life, which takes everyone's efforts to build and is achieved only when the basic needs of our citizens for food, shelter, health and education are met. That is why it is important to ensure that every citizen pays taxes to the State, as the working and professional classes do. It is Governments' duty to take action against tax evasion, which affects the ability of the State to help the poorest and deepens inequality. Rulers must implement public policies and develop programmes that allow the State to distribute resources equitably, so that the most vulnerable are equipped with the tools to contribute to development and use resources sustainably.

Countries have to be accountable in the interests of achieving transparency in the administration of State resources. However, it is important to ensure that the misdeeds of the political classes and their supporters in business do not hurt innocent people. The fight against corruption is not measured by the numbers of those who are prosecuted and convicted by the judicial system, but rather by the numbers of those who benefit from a transparent administration of State resources, so that they are recovered for the State's use. That is important. Rulers have to defend their countries' economies and the jobs and projects that benefit the people.

Panama is committed to the security and protection of its logistics platforms and financial systems. We

continue to work responsibly to prevent illegal activities that undermine the common good. In a world that is constantly talking about justice, we Heads of State and Government must keep in mind that justice means giving all of us what is rightfully ours. Our planet is rich enough for all human beings to have a decent life. The most important value for the inhabitants of the Earth is peace. It is our responsibility to ensure that our actions are always aligned with the pursuit of that goal. May God bless us all and guide us in our work towards a better world.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Panama for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Rwanda.

Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kagame: Every year, the United Nations channels billions of dollars in humanitarian assistance. It also sets the global agenda on key policy issues from development to women's rights, while providing a platform for major international agreements. Those are signs of an Organization that is both relevant and, in many cases, effective. And yet there is a sense that the United Nations is not meeting our needs and expectations. In that context, I would like to commend the Secretary-General, and to congratulate the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, on the two important initiatives that the Secretary-General championed this week — his initiative on United Nations reform and his response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Those steps go to the heart of the matter, which is the deficit of trust and accountability in the international system. To be truly effective in delivering a decent life for all, the United Nations must treat all the people it serves with impartiality and respect, and it must be a good steward of the funds entrusted to it. Abuse and waste are therefore not a mere public-relations problem but an existential challenge that must be tackled head-on.

The Secretary-General deserves our full support in his efforts to make the United Nations not only effective but transformational. We have the tools and the mandates to address the global challenges of our day, from climate change to peacebuilding to human equality and development. Where we fall short is in getting things done.

Institutional reform is not a one-off event like applying a fresh coat of paint. The essence of reform is a mindset of constantly striving to improve performance and delivery and holding ourselves responsible for shortcomings and results. In that sense, the reform spirit that has started to take root in both the United Nations and the African Union is encouraging, and Rwanda is happy to be associated with both. This positive momentum is also positioning the United Nations and the African Union to work more closely together.

Concrete steps can be taken on both sides to improve the quality of coordination and consultation. The African Union and the United Nations are already good partners in peacekeeping, and Rwanda is happy and proud to have forces serving under both flags. But we can do much more and do it better.

Mr. Rajaonarimampianina Rakotoarimanana (Madagascar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We also share the common objective of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063 targets, and of continuing to enhance women's empowerment. Closer collaboration will help us bridge the growing digital divide through universal broadband access, which can connect our people to networks of knowledge and prosperity.

Canada and Rwanda, together with other stakeholders, are working to raise awareness of the tremendous impact we can have right away by ratifying and implementing the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol. This is among the most important actions that a country can take in directly tackling climate change and reaffirming its commitment to the Paris Agreement. Fewer than 15 additional ratifications

are needed in order for the Kigali Amendment to come into force in 2019.

Our world is facing difficult challenges, but no more than in the past. Working together in a constructive spirit, we can ensure for our children the future they deserve.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Rwanda for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Cartes Jara (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Paraguayan people and the Government of Paraguay, I hope that under the presidency of Mr. Miroslav Lajčák the General Assembly will have great success in fulfilling the purposes of the United Nations.

On behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, I wish to express to the people and the Government of Mexico our solidarity with the victims of yesterday's earthquake, whose epicentre was in Morelos state, and to extend our sincerest condolences to the families of the victims of the tragedy.

After four years as Head of the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, I have the honour of participating in the General Assembly with strengthened resolve to contribute to building a world order governed by the principles of justice, peace and solidarity among nations and within an effective framework of human rights, State institutions and the rule of law. We must persist in our efforts to strike a reasonable balance between the interests of all States and to build a democratic and equitable world order, while developing relations among sovereign, independent States based on respect and trust and prioritizing the peaceful coexistence whereby all nations can enjoy the same opportunities.

To that end, we need the bodies of the United Nations, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council, to work efficiently. We seek a more democratic, transparent, inclusive and representative Security Council that reflects the diversity of the States Members of the United Nations and the geopolitical realities of today's world.

The Organization continues to be the most important universal forum for tackling global challenges. Problems such as poverty and inequality, climate change, transnational organized crime, drug trafficking — which undermines democratic institutions — and terrorism, among others, must be dealt with collectively. We urge all stakeholders to focus their efforts and resources on responding to these shared and pressing challenges faced by humankind.

The Republic of Paraguay reaffirms its firm commitment to implementing the provisions of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and encourages other States, particularly those that are most responsible for producing greenhouse gases, to take all necessary measures to save our planet from the consequences of global warming. In Paraguay, our vision of social responsibility is behind our efforts to increase our production of clean and renewable energy. We have two impressive hydraoelectric dams — Itaipu, which we share with Brazil, and Yacyreta, shared with Argentina. This year, Itaipu Binacional was incorporated into the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves, as was the Alto Parana Atlantic forest.

My mandate as President of my country comes to an end in August 2018. This is my final address to the United Nations, and I would like to mention several improvements that we have made since I took office in 2013.

Today Paraguay is a full representative democracy with a true separation of powers, solid electoral processes and a fully effective rule of law. We have given clear signals to the international community, both publicly and privately, on our country's improved potential as an investment vehicle, in the area of cooperation and with regard to treaties.

Where foreign relations and Paraguay's role in the world are concerned, our interactions have grown exponentially through visits and invitations received as well as participation in international organizations. Over the past four years, our country has had official visits from His Holiness Pope Francis, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus', as well as other top officials from multilateral organizations and various Heads of State and international eminent persons who have honoured us with their presence.

Paraguay was unanimously admitted to the Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For us, our membership of that highly prestigious global organization is an unequivocal sign of international recognition of our Government's efforts and achievements through our policies of good practices and institutional robustness. We can proudly say that Paraguay is a member of that select OECD group in an affirmation of the international community's confidence in the significant reforms undertaken by our Government.

Today we are members of the World Intellectual Property Organization Advisory Committee on Enforcement, following years of mistrust of our country regarding respect for intellectual property rights. We have decided to take on additional memberships in international bodies in order to be part of discussions and decision-making, with a view to continually expanding our global presence. The role of Paraguay in the world today transcends borders and continents.

Our priorities within the framework of the United Nations have been established in the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We therefore urge States, especially our trading partners and transit countries, to duly take those into account.

Regional integration has undeniable benefits, especially when we work to achieve it while endeavouring to reconcile the interests of all stakeholders. We are therefore working in the Southern Common Market to revitalize economic and commercial integration while also making progress on the social, employment, scientific and cultural aspects of the bloc, which represents a very positive agenda.

The 2030 Agenda for Sutainable Development is the most ambitious intergovernmental development project in the multilateral sphere. In order to properly implement our national development plan through 2030, we are building an innovative, participatory institutional architecture that is committed to the Agenda's Goals and targets. I am proud to say that, together with the Presidents of our Congress and Supreme Court of Justice, I have publicly signed a joint cross-branch declaration that recognizes Paraguay's absolute commitment to the terms of the 2030 Agenda and its Goals and targets. Paraguay has thus declared itself in favour of the 2030 Agenda through its three State branches, an event previously unheard of in our region.

During these past four years, the Administration I lead has responded justly and effectively to the needs of all sectors of society. When we first came to power, in August 2013, we established three main national policies — poverty reduction through social development; inclusive economic growth; and the expansion of Paraguay's role in the world. As we implemented those policies, we transformed a culture previously marred by political cronyism and bad practices into a model based on transparency and compliance, where public access to information is guaranteed and more opportunities are offered to our people. Access to public information has led to unprecedented progress, and today we have instruments ensuring that public business is conducted in public.

We are undergoing an unprecedented transformation, and although it has triggered some concerns, reactions and resistance from those who were more comfortable with the former model, I can guarantee that it is closing the door on such evils as corruption, which delayed Paraguay's economic and social development for many years. Despite regional economic problems, we have been able to achieve sustained economic growth, and we hope to continue improving our ability to forge relationships throughout the world by being trustworthy and predictable. Paraguay's economic growth in recent years has been constant, and at an annual average of 5.2 per cent is one of the highest in South America.

While we are also working to reduce the poverty rate, years of neglect in the past have made eradicating poverty altogether a major challenge. Our priorities have been focused on giving a strong impetus to social investment, particularly in education, so that people living in poverty can benefit from economic growth

and to help reduce inequality. We are implementing flagship social-protection programmes such as the Tekoporã conditional cash-transfer programme, a school meal programme, food allowances for elderly adults living in poverty and the Sowing Opportunities poverty-reduction programme. In addition, we are increasing our grants of scholarships and financial aid to young people living in poverty, in the firm belief that education and professional training for young people represent the best possible investment for the country's future.

After 175 years, the Paraguayan Government is once again granting postgraduate scholarships for study abroad at the world's best universities, with a record investment of $42 million. Thanks to the Carlos Antonio López scholarships, 1,000 Paraguayans from the country's 17 departments and its capital are doing postgraduate studies in 50 of the world's 200 most prestigious universities. Hundreds of them are teachers and 60 per cent are women under 30 years old. The first 60 have successfully completed their studies and are returning to apply their knowledge for our country's benefit and development.

Another of our national strategic goals in combating poverty focuses on housing programmes designed to offer citizens decent homes, revive the economy and create jobs. In the past four years we have worked hard, transparently and responsibly, with unprecedented results. For the first time in Paraguay's history, by the end of its term a single Government will have delivered on its promise of more than 30,000 public housing units, 10 times more than any previous Administration, and even more valuable because they benefit thousands of families that for years were ignored by previous Governments and now have decent homes and access to better conditions in which to thrive. We are building hope and opportunities so that families in Paraguay's humblest communities — whether in poor urban areas, indigenous regions or rural villages — can move forward. We are transforming our country through transparent and efficient efforts that enable us to make the most of our resources while reducing expenses, eliminating corruption in projects and improving construction quality through rigorous controls.

My Government encourages productive development through responsible investment. We give priority to infrastructure projects that improve connectivity, both nationally and with neighbouring countries. In particular, investment in infrastructure is at its highest in decades, and the scope and modernity of our new road construction is outstanding. We demand responsibility and commitment from our leaders and have worked hard to achieve good standards of living for our people. Thanks to this new model for Government efforts, our country is becoming more efficient, progressive and honest.

The Republic of Paraguay reaffirms its commitment to international peace and security and the use of peaceful means to resolve conflicts, based on mutual cooperation between States. Our Constitution bans weapons of mass destruction, and we therefore welcome the recent adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and reaffirm our belief that the nuclear-disarmament process should be transparent and irreversible, with effective verification mechanisms based on a universal, legally binding framework. We reiterate our condemnation of the nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in clear defiance and breach of its international obligations, constituting yet another provocation to the international community. We hope that the General Assembly will firmly reject such irrational behaviour, which threatens security and peace on a global scale.

The Republic of Paraguay is deeply concerned about the scourge of terrorism, which we condemn in any shape or form. The fight against terrorism must be carried out within a framework of unconditional respect for the precepts of international law, through solid cooperation among States. We will continue to collaborate with peacekeeping operations organized under the auspices of the United Nations, in the belief that they can enable us to achieve the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. My country is currently contributing military personnel, both women and men, to six peacekeeping missions, and invests in the training of its contingents at our peacekeeping operations training centre.

We also reaffirm our commitment to the promotion and effective protection of human rights throughout the world. We firmly believe that we should protect the dignity and rights of all people, without discrimination. We urge the Human Rights Council to continue to fulfil its functions with objectivity, impartiality and universality. In this context, I should not omit to mention a worrying issue in my region, which is that the situation in Venezuela needs urgent attention. I would like to reiterate a message of solidarity to the people of Venezuela, victims of political persecution and human

rights violations, in the hope that our brother nation can find a solution to its current democratic breakdown and deep crisis as soon as possible.

Through international cooperation, the Republic of China on Taiwan has long been engaged in cooperation programmes related to the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. It supports many countries, including Paraguay. Taiwan has relevant knowledge and experience and has contributed effectively to the international community. The Government of Paraguay once again urges all Member States to identify appropriate ways to facilitate Taiwan's participation in the mechanisms for meetings and activities of the United Nations system, so that its 23 million inhabitants can exercise their responsibilities normally as global citizens and establish sustainable alliances with every country.

In our view, Secretary-General António Guterres has made an auspicious start at the helm of the United Nations, supported by his vast experience as a statesman. It will be up to the Heads of State of member countries during this session to ensure that it can be a starting point of a new era for the true universalization of the principles guiding the functioning of the Organization, particularly so that its programmes and actions can reduce the enormous inequalities that still exist between countries and regions.

I reaffirm that my country will continue to give high priority to its participation in United Nations debates, in our belief in the importance of the Organization's work in building a more peaceful and just world. For our part, we will continue to work resolutely towards development with true social inclusion, creating conditions for prosperity and always putting people first. I would like to conclude with an exhortation from Pope Francis: "Let us never forget that authentic power is service."

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rouhani (*spoke in Farsi; interpretation provided by the delegation*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Lajčák on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. I would also like to congratulate Secretary-General Guterres on his appointment to his high office and to wish him every success in his crucial responsibilities.

Four months ago, more than 41 million people — 73 per cent of the total of Iran's eligible voters — came to the polls in our country's twelfth presidential election and once again expressed confidence in my platform, which calls for moderation and respect for human rights, prosperity and economic revitalization at home, and for constructive engagement around the world. Their vote illustrated the maturity of the electorate in a society that has been experiencing free and democratic governance for only four decades.

Our latest election was not merely a vote for a President. It represents a huge political investment on the part of our resilient people, who truly constitute our most reliable asset. Human and civil rights, along with a quest for justice and Islamic values, have been at the heart of the principal demands of the Iranian people for their more than 150 years of struggle, particularly during the Islamic revolution of 1979. In its first term, while pursuing nuclear negotiations internationally, at home my Government focused on discussing and articulating our citizens' rights, resulting in the promulgation of a Citizens' Rights Charter and its adoption for implementation, thereby meeting the demands of a people who, in their desire to restore their rights and human dignity, first rose up against a dictatorial regime 111 years ago, in their constitutional revolution, and again 39 years ago, in the Islamic revolution.

I declare here in this Hall that moderation is the preferred and chosen path of the great Iranian people. Moderation seeks neither isolation nor hegemony. It implies neither indifference nor intransigence. The path of moderation is the path of peace. That peace is a just and inclusive peace, not one that means peace for one nation and war and turmoil for others. Moderation is freedom and democracy, conducted in an inclusive and comprehensive manner that does not purport to promote freedom in one place while supporting dictators elsewhere. Moderation is the synergy of ideas, not a dance of swords. And lastly, the path of moderation nurtures beauty. Exports of deadly weapons are not beautiful. Peace is beautiful. In Iran, we strive to build peace and promote the human rights of peoples and nations. We never condone tyranny and we always defend those whose voices are not heard. But while we never threaten anyone, neither do we tolerate threats from anyone. Our discourse is based on dignity and respect, and we are unmoved by threats and intimidation. We believe in dialogue and negotiation conducted on an equal footing and based on mutual respect.

In today's globalized world, peace, security, stability and the progress of all nations are intertwined. We cannot see a rogue and racist regime trample on the most basic rights of Palestinians while the usurpers of their land enjoy security. No one can aspire to long-term stability, prosperity and development while Muslims in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Myanmar and so many other places live in misery, war and poverty.

Throughout its history, Iran has been a bastion of tolerance for many religions and ethnicities. We are the same people who rescued the Jews from Babylonian servitude, opened our arms to welcome Armenian Christians in our midst and created the Iranian cultural continent with a unique mix of diverse religions and ethnicities. I represent the same Iran that has historically assisted the oppressed. Centuries ago, we supported the rights of the Jewish people and today we are insisting on the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people. Iran is still the same country, supporting justice and seeking tranquillity.

Today we are on the front lines fighting terror and religious extremism in the Middle East, not for sectarian or ethnic reasons but for ethical, humanitarian and strategic ones. Iran does not seek to restore its ancient empire, impose its official religion on others or export its revolution through the force of arms. We have enough confidence in the depth of our culture, the truth of our faith and the tenacity and longevity of our revolution that we will never seek to export any of them in the way that neocolonialists do through the heavy boots of soldiers. To promote our culture, civilization, religion and revolution, we enter hearts and engage minds. We recite our poetry and engage in discourse on our philosophy. Our ambassadors are our poets, mystics and philosophers. We have reached these shores of the Atlantic through Rumi and spread our influence all over Asia with Saadi. We have already captured the world through Hafez, so we are not in need of new conquests.

The call for moderation is from a nation that has been committed to it. We do not preach moderation; we practice it, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a case in point. The deal is the outcome of two years of intensive multilateral negotiations, overwhelmingly applauded by the international community and endorsed by the Security Council through resolution 2231 (2015). As such, it belongs to the entire international community, not just one or two countries. The JCPOA can become a new model for global interaction based on mutual constructive engagement among us all. We have opened our doors to engagement and cooperation and concluded scores of development agreements with advanced countries in both the East and the West.

Unfortunately, there are some who have deprived themselves of that unique opportunity, in a way that amounts to imposing sanctions on themselves, and now they feel betrayed. We were not deceived, and neither did we cheat or deceive anyone else. We determined the extent of our nuclear programme ourselves. We never sought to achieve deterrence through nuclear weapons. We have immunized ourselves through our people's knowledge and, more importantly, their resilience. That is our talent and our approach. Some say that they wanted to deprive Iran of nuclear weapons, but we have always vociferously rejected such weapons. We have never been distressed about forgoing an option that we never actually sought. It is reprehensible that a rogue Zionist regime that threatens regional and global security with its nuclear arsenal and is not committed to any international instrument or safeguard has the audacity to preach to peaceful nations.

Imagine how the Middle East would look if the JCPOA had not been concluded. Imagine that along with

civil wars, takfiri terror, humanitarian nightmares and complex sociopolitical crises in West Asia there was a manufactured nuclear crisis. How would we all fare? I declare here to the Assembly that while the Islamic Republic of Iran will not be the first country to violate the agreement, it will respond decisively and resolutely to any violation of it by any party. It would be a great pity if it were to be destroyed by rogue newcomers to the world of politics, and the world would have lost a great opportunity. But such unfortunate behaviour will never halt Iran in its course of progress and advancement. By violating its international commitments, the new United States Administration only destroys its own credibility and undermines international confidence in negotiating with it or accepting its promises.

Four years ago in the Assembly, the Islamic Republic of Iran sponsored the initiative of resolution 68/127, "A world against violence and violent extremism". We consider dialogue and negotiations based on a positive-sum paradigm to be the only path to resolving global and regional crises. We have made a conscious decision to strengthen relations with our neighbours and others in the region, as well as to enhance our cooperation with all friendly countries. We cannot navigate the complex and dangerous challenges in this turbulent transitional global phase without expanding interaction and exchanges and institutionalizing dialogue between nations and States. The ignorant, absurd and hateful rhetoric filled with ridiculously baseless allegations that we heard yesterday in this Hall was not only unfit to be heard at the United Nations — which was established to promote peace and respect between nations — but in fact contradicted the demands of the nations of this global Organization that it bring Governments together in the battle against war and terror.

I wish to emphasize that the defence capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including its missiles, are solely defensive deterrents for maintaining regional peace and stability and suppressing the adventurist tendencies of irrational aspirants. We cannot forget that civilians in many of our cities became the target of long-range missile attacks by Saddam Hussein during his eight-year war of aggression against us. We will never allow our people to become victims of such catastrophic delusions again. Instability and extremist violence have only been exacerbated in our region through the military interventions of extra-regional actors — the same Powers that try to sell ever more of their deadly weapons to other States by accusing Iran of fomenting instability. I want to emphasize that foreign intervention and the imposition of alien wishes on the people of the region can only widen and deepen the crises in our region. The crises in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain do not have military solutions and can be resolved only through an end to the hostilities and acceptance of the will and desires of their peoples. The United States Government should explain to its own people why, after spending billions of dollars of the assets of the people of America and our region, it has brought the region only war, misery, poverty and the rise of terrorism and extremism rather than contributing to peace and stability.

In the past four years, Iran has demonstrated that its economy has unparalleled potential for expansion and growth. Economic sanctions not only have not hindered it, they have solidified the popular resolve to enhance domestic production. Iran's achievement of the highest global growth rate last year proved that its economy has the potential to become the world's most vibrant emerging economy within the next 20 years, with a trillion-dollar growth potential. Our strategic choice for achieving such sustainable and balanced growth is an extensive network of global partnerships. We firmly believe that development and security can grow only if they grow together, and that common interests can bind us regionally and globally to guarantee both regional and global security.

Iran, with the world's largest gas and oil reserves, is prepared to engage in long-term cooperation to advance global energy security. We are eager to expand international transit corridors through joint ventures in sea, rail and road infrastructure projects. Our achievements in enhancing economic infrastructures through a nation-wide gas pipeline, a national electricity grid and rail and road transport have made it possible for various industries to produce their goods at a lower cost, with easy access to national and regional markets. With our current friendly legal environment, many foreign investors have come to Iran, leading to an ever-increasing number of investments, joint ventures and financing agreements in multiple fields. It is the policy of my Government to continue to steadily enhance the entrepreneurial environment, protect intellectual property rights, consistently improve corporate governance and engage in a robust campaign against money-laundering in order to enhance a legal climate conducive to business and

economic investments in various fields, particularly knowledge-based enterprises.

The Iranian nation is resolutely determined to build a free and advanced Iran and participate in developing a secure and stable region based on ethics and respect for international law. In that endeavour, we welcome the participation and cooperation of all investors, intellectuals and innovators from all over the world. From this global rostrum, and as the representative of the people of Iran, who are world-famous for their hospitality, I invite all who seek peace, security and progress through partnership and cooperation among nations to visit Iran and join us in building this future of hope.

If we truly believe in our collective decision of four years ago in the General Assembly to work for a world against violence and violent extremism, we can turn the discourse of imposition, unilateralism, intimidation and war into the logic of dialogue, synergy and peace, so that moderation can become the dominant voice across the globe.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Radev: I would first like to offer my most sincere condolences to the people and Government of Mexico for yesterday's devastating earthquake.

It is an honour for me to address this forum. I congratulate His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and wish him every success in his important mission.

This session is a special one for my country, since while it is still going on Bulgaria will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union. This year the general debate puts a special emphasis on our common effort to strive for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet, thereby highlighting the importance of prevention, mediation, sustainable development, preservation of the environment and respect for human rights through a people-centred approach. The United Nations upholds our shared goals of peace and security, and development and human rights.

Conflicts in many parts of the world continue to undermine international peace and security and the fundamental values of humankind. Outbreaks of violence devastate local economies, trigger large movements of refugees and migrants, and spread diseases, famine and immense human suffering on a massive scale. Children are usually the most adversely affected in any crisis situation. The root causes of armed conflicts should be addressed in a more systematic way by ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, improving the economic situation and promoting social inclusion.

Leaving no one behind and reaching the farthest behind first are not simply political declarations meant to invigorate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If we are to transform our world by lifting it out of poverty, we must fully implement the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting equality, inclusion and participation.

Protracted conflicts require a holistic United Nations response, encompassing preventive diplomacy, mediation, peacebuilding and effective special political missions. That response is critical to restoring governance and stabilizing political, economic and social conditions in crisis and post-conflict countries.

Over the past several years the United Nations peace and security architecture has benefited from three peace and security reviews that, together with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, have provided a solid foundation for achieving peace and prosperity. In that regard, Bulgaria supports the surge in diplomacy for peace, which places prevention as an overarching

priority of the United Nations work and sets the stage for the necessary reforms to sustain peace.

Prevention and mediation are essential means for reducing human suffering, including in addressing the root causes of forced displacements by bringing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts together. The situation in the Middle East and North Africa remains of deep concern and should be addressed in a comprehensive manner, but the international community should not be distracted from the urgent need to revive the Middle East peace process. Bulgaria reaffirms its position that a two-State solution formula is the realistic, just and lasting way to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is our belief that a solution that can fulfil the aspirations of both sides can be achieved only through direct negotiations, with no conditions and in conformity with the relevant international obligations.

Finding a political solution to the ongoing conflict in Syria and implementing a credible political transition in the country will be essential to preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian State. We support all actions aimed at achieving a cessation of hostilities as soon as possible and conducting effective and constructive inter-Syrian negotiations in Geneva in order to achieve a lasting political solution to the crisis. We consider a political dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations to be the only way that can gradually improve the security situation in Syria and sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis.

Another source of deep concern to my country is the situation in eastern Ukraine, which, regrettably, remains highly volatile despite periodic ceasefire agreements. We reiterate our call for the swift and full implementation of the Minsk agreements, to which there is no viable alternative. We consistently support the activity of multilateral formats such as the Normandy Four and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Trilateral Contact Group, considering their role in advancing the political and diplomatic efforts for a peaceful settlement of the conflict to be key.

Bulgaria is fully committed to the peace and stabilization process in Afghanistan and considers reconciliation a major prerequisite for stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan and beyond. We encourage the National Unity Government to continue with needed reforms in key areas, such as good governance, the rule of law, a credible electoral process, combating corruption and narcotics, and tackling gender and social issues.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are among the main pillars of international security and therefore represent tangible aspects of the effort to achieve peace and a decent life. Bulgaria reiterates its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, as well as to the objective of attaining a world free of nuclear weapons. That goal is achievable only through the participation of all States, and the nuclear-weapon States in particular. We should aim at feasible but universal measures that will gradually and irreversibly lead to the final objective of a world without nuclear weapons. The next two steps in that direction could be the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the start of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme, concluded in July 2015, continues to be historically significant. Its full implementation is extremely important to regional and global stability, and my country reiterates its full support for it.

Bulgaria categorically condemns the repeated nuclear tests and missile launches by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which have led to a further escalation of tensions in the region and are undermining world peace and security. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to end its nuclear and ballistic programmes once and for all in a complete, irreversible and verifiable manner, and to engage in constructive dialogue with the international community. We reiterate our commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic and political solution to the situation.

The recent terrorist attacks are tragic reminders of the scale of the challenge ahead. Bulgaria shares the view that the newly established Office of Counter-Terrorism marks a milestone in the efforts to improve United Nations efficiency in fighting terrorism by supporting the balanced implementation of the 2006 Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, strengthening coordination among the relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as promoting preventive measures that address the drivers of extremism.

Bulgaria is deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale of organized looting of cultural

property in Iraq, Syria, Libya and other countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. We condemn the illicit trafficking and illegal trade in cultural objects as a tactic of war and a source of profits for financing terrorism. It is a threat that requires a global response. A number of legal instruments and resolutions have been adopted by UNESCO, the United Nations, the European Parliament and others. We have laid the legal foundations and it is our common duty to ensure their full implementation. The Antiquities Coalition, UNESCO's #Unite4Heritage social-media campaign and other activities epitomize a very positive global trend for action aimed at the preservation and protection of the world's cultural heritage.

International migration is a global phenomenon, and only through joint efforts such as the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration can we ensure a balanced approach that includes respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as effective border management and re-admission. States have the right and responsibility to manage and control their borders as a central element of their national security. Strict border controls are vitally important, particularly in the context of preventing irregular migration and eradicating human trafficking. For Bulgaria, the top priority is the effective management and control of the European Union's external border, enabling free movement within the European Union to function smoothly.

Climate change continues to represent one of the biggest challenges of our time. Not only is it a threat to our countries' well-being, it also poses a security risk to many of them. Bulgaria stands by its obligations under the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and believes that only a universal approach to its implementation can achieve the goals of the United Nations climate-change agenda.

Bulgaria is strongly committed to promoting human rights and is actively involved in a number of intergovernmental processes dedicated to global advancement of the human rights agenda. As co-Chair of the Group of Friends for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals at the United Nations, Bulgaria strongly advocates for integrating children's rights into all major intergovernmental processes, since children are the real agents of positive social change. As President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the period 2017-2018, Bulgaria actively promotes the full inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

Bulgaria is determined to further contribute to promoting human rights internationally as a member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021, and is relying on its partners' valuable support for its candidacy. In the past few decades, the United Nations has taken crucial steps to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Those efforts should be further strengthened in order to achieve tangible results for women and girls by eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. Ensuring equal rights for women and men should be an integral part of everyday policies in all spheres of life. Promoting equality, countering discrimination and ensuring respect for human rights are key to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development, and we believe that the protection of human rights should be at the centre of all actions undertaken by the United Nations.

The world is currently facing enormous challenges, perhaps the greatest that humankind has ever encountered, and we, the Member States of the United Nations, must provide solutions to them. It is time to take action.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Bulgaria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.